

Wein

THE PEARL THIEF

L B
LITTLE,
BROWN

Wein



ROSE UNDER FIRE



L B
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BROWN

Wein



CODE NAME VERITY



L B
LITTLE,
BROWN

WEIN

The

ENIGMA GAME

L B
LITTLE,
BROWN

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The
**ENIGMA
GAME**

ELIZABETH WEIN

New York Times best-selling author of *Code Name Verity*

The
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GAME**

ELIZABETH WEIN



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Part 1

ODYSSEUS

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Flight Lieutenant James G. Beaufort-Stuart:

The night of 6–7 November 1940—how many of us dead in that raid?

I don't know.

I know nine men in 648 Squadron's A-Flight were killed that night just because of *weather*. Two planes collided in fog just before landing, and one came down heavy with ice. But I don't know how many in A-Flight fell to enemy fire.

How many in B-Flight, then? My own lads... I ought to know that, at least.

But I don't. Not offhand. I'd have to sit and count. I probably made a note in my logbook. That night wasn't the first time we took a heavy loss, and it wasn't the last time. *Buckets of blood*. It wasn't as many as last time. Anyway it's hard to remember all the losses, which for Bristol Blenheim bomber crews was just about every mission, and I get some of the dead men muddled when I try to count. The Royal Air Force isn't going to win the war flying Bristol Blenheims.

I'd argued with Wing Commander Talbot Cromwell before we took off on that mission. That wasn't the first time, either. I knew he didn't like me, and I risked an official reprimand, or worse, a demotion, every time I challenged him. We didn't see eye to eye on *anything*.

"We'll never find German warships if we're flying at twenty thousand feet!" I told my commanding officer. I didn't even try to hide my anger. "There's no hope in hell of a Blenheim hitting anything from that height anyway. The bomb doors don't always open when you want them to, and up there you can't tell whether a speck out the window is an enemy destroyer or a bit of runway mud stuck on the Perspex!"

"Are you quite finished, Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart?" said Cromwell, lowering his eyebrows like barrier gates. "You'll fly at twenty thousand feet, and so will all your men. Orders are orders. That's where Coastal Command wants you to fly. I take my

instructions from headquarters and you take yours from me.”

Cromwell and I had been at each other since the day we first came together about two weeks earlier.

He got transferred to us in October when we moved to Shetland as the Battle of Britain came to an end. Our squadron patrolled the North Sea for the Royal Air Force, the RAF, just as we’d done at other bases all through the summer of 1940. But Cromwell’s role with 648 Squadron was new. Before he got lumbered with us, he’d commanded a squadron of speedy new Spitfire fighters. In August and September, while we were flying Blenheims under cover of cloud on low-level bombing raids targeting German ships, he’d been sending fighter pilots into soaring dogfights in the sun.

None of our experiences matched up. He couldn’t manage twin engines and didn’t join us when we flew. And he didn’t like it that at nineteen years old I was half his age, shorter and slighter than most of the other lads and barely needing a shave, yet I talked back. He didn’t like that all of B-Flight were on my side because they were Blenheim airmen too; maybe I looked like a schoolboy, but they knew I wasn’t. I’d been their flight leader since August.

And sending us on a bombing raid with only a half-moon to light us, above cloud at twenty thousand feet? I was reckless with frustration.

“It’s stupid, *stupid*—everyone knows it. The men are complaining. *You* know it’s stupid. *Above the cloud*? We won’t be able to see the sea, let alone ships in the dark! And the air’s too thin up there for a Blenheim to operate efficiently. It’s not like flying a Spitfire! We cruise best at fifteen thousand feet, and when we’re in combat we take it as low as we can, it helps camouflage us. And the Jerries—the German fighters all *know* they can go higher and faster, and they circle like vultures, *waiting*—”

“None of my Spitfire pilots complained about danger,” Cromwell said coldly. “I expect more of a young man of your caliber, *Beaufort-Stuart*. This sounds like lack of moral fiber.”

Lack of moral fiber—that wonderful euphemism for cowardice.

I couldn’t let him accuse me, or worse, my 648 Squadron airmen, of being cowards.

I said stiffly, “Sir. I’m leading B-Flight on a mission tonight. I want the best for them.”

“When you go in at low level, you get shot up by enemy anti-aircraft guns,” Cromwell told me, as if I didn’t know. “We need

to change our tactics.”

It was true that most of our losses came from guns on the ground or at sea level. I couldn't argue with that. But I felt sure that a raid at twenty thousand feet would end in the same tears for different reasons, or at best, be completely pointless because we wouldn't hit anything. It wasn't the first time Coastal Command had tried it.

However, with no winning counterargument, off we went, hoping a few of us would make it back safely in five hours or so. Following orders.

The Blenheims were like a herd of shadowy brontosauri waiting on the airfield in the dark beneath the high cloud.

“Come on, Scotty, buck up,” said David Silvermont, my navigator, as we lowered ourselves in our bulky flight suits through the forward hatch of that night's plane. Being the only Scot in the squadron meant that I mostly hadn't been called Jamie for the past year or so, except on leave. “We can't have you in a funk—it brings everybody down. The lads take your moods very seriously.”

“Wing Commander Cromwell bloody well doesn't,” I retorted. “I wish he'd have a go at you sometime instead of me.”

“No chance, as you're the officer in charge. Anyway I am much bigger and older than you, and better looking too and probably smarter, so he doesn't dare.”

“And you have a bigger head than me!” I laughed.

Most of those things were true, as David Silvermont was two years my senior and had been halfway through a medical degree when the war started. But he was also my best friend. He was easy to like and smooth with girls, with the brooding dark looks of a film star, and was good at breaking up fights and at making me laugh. Silver read poetry before he went to bed; he played Mozart on the cracked fiddle he'd found in the officers' lounge when we were off duty; but those highbrow occupations didn't stop him plotting a course by dead reckoning, or spotting enemy convoys, or having a sense of humor.

He was a wizard navigator.

“What's up?” called our air gunner and wireless operator, Colin Oldham, from his place in the back of the Blenheim.

“Just the usual scrapping with Cromwell,” I grumbled. “Accused me of 'lack of moral fiber.'”

“Rubbish! *He's* not flying tonight, is he!” Colin exclaimed.

"I expect he doesn't like your poncey double-barreled surname," Silver teased me. "It reminds the old Roundhead that your dad's the Earl of Craigie, and then he wants to start the Civil War over again. Can't have teenage toffs telling him what to do."

Colin howled. "'The Old Roundhead!' Suits him!"

"I don't tell him what to do," I protested, checking the instruments and controls while Silver and Colin belted their harnesses in place. "I make polite suggestions about what *not* to do. And being the youngest of five sons doesn't mean a thing. They ran out of titles before they got to me."

"It's your classical education he doesn't like," put in Colin.

"I'll make a list, shall I? Perhaps if I were taller or bigger or grew a mustache—"

"He doesn't like me much, either," Silver said with sympathy.

"You both make him feel inferior," said Colin. "All that heady talk in the officers' lounge comparing hydraulics to blood pressure. He can't keep up."

"Hydraulics and blood pressure are endlessly fascinating," said Silver. He spread his chart on his knees, holding his electric torch ready in his gauntleted hand. He declared with satisfaction, "From tonight I shall always think of him as the Old Roundhead."

My B-Flight aircrews knew what we were doing that night—three planes in my own Pimms Section and three in Madeira Section, with three men in each plane. In a few minutes I'd be in the sky in the dark in charge of eighteen men, counting myself, and in a few hours half of them would be dead.

I didn't know then what the full toll of that night would be, and I tried to lighten the tone as we set out. I called over the radio to Pimms and Madeira as we took off. "Setting course for target and climbing to twenty thousand feet, as per orders from the Old Roundhead."

Over the intercom I heard Colin behind me laughing again.

"The Old Roundhead might be keeping a listening watch," Silver warned me.

"I don't mind. I'll get another damned reprimand. He already knows what I think of him."

We flew obediently high, heading for a flotilla of German warships that was supposed to be cruising fifty miles off the Norwegian coast. After about an hour and a half, maybe we were over the ships we were supposed to hit and maybe we weren't. The

sky was clear and blue-black, but the half-moon lit the thin cloud below us like a sheet of milky Chinese silk. I could see the other B-Flight planes standing out in black silhouette like decals against that cloud.

So, too, could the German Messerschmitt 110 night fighters on patrol.

We didn't have lights and neither did they, and we didn't see them coming. They can fly a hundred miles an hour faster than we can. But Silver and I both saw the streaks of green flame as the tracers flew from the first rounds of their thundering guns. And we saw the explosion of golden fire as the bullets struck an engine on another Blenheim in our formation.

Silver opened the observer's panel in the window next to his head and twisted around to stick his nose out so he could see behind us. "There's one on our tail!" he cried. "*Dive, dive—*"

"Down, *everybody get down!*" I called to my lads over the radio. "Use the cloud! Get into it or below it where they can't see you! Drop your bombs if you have to, lose the weight—"

I pushed my own plane into a nosedive. Our only hope against an Me-110 was to get away from it. Hide in cloud, camouflage yourself against the earth's surface. For a moment, behind me, I could hear Colin's gun rattling back at our attackers.

In a Blenheim, the air gunner has to sit with his head up out of the plane in a bubble of Perspex like a goldfish bowl on a windowsill. The gunner's turret is often the first thing that goes when the Jerries are after you. And that's exactly what happened that night, with a deafening bang that I felt more than heard. *God.* The wind in the cockpit, after our turret exploded, howling around us as we sped toward the black sea below. The mess of blood and bone that had been Colin, all over the inside of the plane and the back of Silver's leather helmet.

That missed me, anyway—I was protected from Colin by the bulkhead between the pilot's seat and the radio equipment.

The sky went small and gray. I was diving too fast—in another few seconds the increased gravity would knock us out.

I must have leveled up somehow.

I skimmed so low over the sea, when I reached it, that the poor Blenheim's tail wheel snagged in a swell and snapped off.

In front of us, seawater erupted like a geyser as someone overhead got rid of their explosives, and I was too close to the

surface to turn away from the plumbing waterspout. I had to fly through it. We lost windowpanes in the front cockpit and Silver's charts were soaked, but we were still flying on the other side.

We were being bombed by our *own planes*.

We saw two Blenheims go plummeting in flames into the water around us while we struggled away from the waves.

It was the morning of 7 November 1940, and I was so stunned and spent after I landed back at our base in Shetland that I couldn't think. I shut down the engines, and Silver and I sat in silence. We didn't even try to get out.

Then a couple of mechanics climbed on the wing to open the hatches, and Silver looked up. He put a hand on my shoulder and said softly, "Nice flying, Scotty, as per usual. Thanks for getting us home."

He'd taken off his gloves to rescue the charts and to use the pencils and flight calculator on the way back. His hands must have been freezing. But he made the same cheesy joke every time we landed safely—he'd be able to play the violin again. He pulled the little box of rosin from his knee pocket, the lucky charm that went with him on every op, and held it between thumb and forefinger with both hands in front of his face.

"Look, everything still in one piece."

He couldn't *not* say it. He couldn't *not* take the rosin with him. I had a charm too, in the breast pocket of my uniform beneath my flight suit, a perfectly round quartz pebble from the Iron Age hill fort on my father's grouse moor.

"You're welcome," I croaked.

Our clothes were soaked with seawater and Colin Oldham's blood. It was all over the cockpit, and we had to climb through it to get out the hatch.

Half an hour later I sat down in front of Flight Officer Phyllis Pennyworth, our brisk, chirpy robin of a Women's Auxiliary Air Force interrogator who was in charge of grilling us after a mission—and I got so choked up I couldn't talk. I sat for a while with my elbows on my knees and my head in my hands, and she just let me do that, didn't say anything, knew what was coming—or guessed, anyway.

When I looked up, the pretty pink had faded a bit from her rosy cheeks. She loved us all very much. But in the debriefing room

Pennyworth took care to be all business, and this time I was too broken and beat to do my job politely.

“Too many German planes to count,” I told her. “Bloody Jerries in their bloody Messerschmitt 110s. Those Luftwaffe night fighters. Like a swarm of hornets—they know where we’re coming from and what we’re after, and they’re a million miles an hour faster than us —”

“Not a million, Scotty,” Phyllis corrected gently. Using my nickname instead of my rank title the way most of my lads did, so that I knew she cared, but reminding me to be precise so she could make an accurate report. She was a stickler for rules herself, and she was scared of the Old Roundhead.

“Might as well be a million.” It came out as a sort of sob. “These old Blenheims we fly, these airborne buckets of bolts we’re in, these crates don’t have a chance against a Messerschmitt 110 night fighter!”

And I gave a real sob then, because of Colin.

I didn’t tell Phyllis Pennyworth about the mess. She’d seen our busted-up plane—half the glass in the front cockpit punched out, a furrow plowed in the airfield behind us by our tail because we’d lost the tail wheel, the gaping hole where the gunner’s turret used to be. She wasn’t stupid; she knew what had happened to Colin. She waited while I tried to pull myself together, and when I still didn’t say anything, she sighed and put down her pen and lit a cigarette for me.

I took it and my hands didn’t shake. I hadn’t lost my nerve—I was angry. Not just at the Germans, our enemy. I was angry at my commanding officer, at Wing Commander Talbot Cromwell, for being so blind to what we were up against, and at Coastal Command itself, whoever they were, making impossible rules in some comfortable headquarters in England while we bled our lives out in unforgiving sky and sea.

I tried to smoke. Phyllis passed me her ashtray. I was nearly angry at her, too, behaving herself and reporting to them. But she was good at her job, unlike Cromwell; she’d been with us since June and she knew us well.

“When we fly that high the mission is absolutely pointless, but when we come in at a low level to bomb the German ships, we get shot up by their antiaircraft guns,” I said bitterly. “I just want an advantage, you know? I want to know where their submarines are,

or if there are night fighters about, before they're on top of us. Some wee thing. *One thing* that we can do better than the Germans. One surprising smack in their faces."

"We stopped the invasion," Phyllis said. "You helped too, two months ago when we were fighting the Battle of Britain. We made them back off. That was a smack in their faces."

"Now they're bombing our cities to blazes—that's not backing off!"

"We all want revenge," Phyllis said softly.

That surprised me a little. I didn't think of earnest, diligent Flight Officer Pennyworth as someone who had unwholesome emotions that might involve a thirst for blood. I glanced up at her, thinking she might be offering mechanical sympathy to another shot-down airman—or I suppose I should say *shot up*, not *shot down*, as I'd managed to bring the crate back and land it in one piece.

Her eyes were red and her mouth was set in a stubborn, steely pout. I guess Flight Officer Pennyworth got the job partly because she didn't cry easily. Maybe she did want revenge.

"We'll win," Phyllis said firmly. "We'll keep fighting, and someday we'll win fair and square."

I'd let my cigarette go out. I dumped it in the ashtray. What had Cromwell told me?

We need to change our tactics.

"I don't want to win fair and square anymore," I said through my teeth. *"I want to cheat."*

Louisa Adair:

Daddy said I lost my Jamaican accent in one year. *One year* at the rather posh London school where my mother taught music, and I had a polite accent I'd picked up from my schoolteachers. I didn't even know it was happening. There wasn't any other obvious way to blend in, with my light brown skin and springing dark brown hair, tamed into plaits by Mummy and then into tight rolls by me when I got older. "Me booonoonoonoos country gal is turning into a little English lady," Daddy teased. But it stopped the other girls from teasing.

In November 1940, my polite English accent came in useful.

I was fifteen years old and both my parents were killed in a single month by German explosives, Mummy in an air raid and Daddy in a sea battle, thousands of miles apart. My school closed because of the Blitz even before Mummy was killed, but I was old enough I didn't need to stay in school anyway. Now I was stuck by myself in Mummy's rented attic room surrounded by falling bombs. Our elderly landladies looked in on me and made sure I didn't starve, but all I did in the first shocked, horrible weeks after Mummy's death was bury my nose in books whose orphaned heroines got happy endings.

I reread *A Little Princess*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Anne of Green Gables*, but my literary friends began to feel disappointing. They didn't have to cope with air raids. Nobody was rude to them for being foreign. Sara Crewe was born in India and spoke Hindustani, but she still *looked* English. When people shooed her away it wasn't because she was brown.

I had a bit more money than Sara Crewe or Jane Eyre or Anne Shirley, that was true. There was twenty-five pounds in Mummy's post office account. But it wouldn't last forever. I had to have something to do when it ran out, or I would end up living in an air-raid shelter on an Underground platform. The only person I could go to was Granny Adair, Daddy's mother in Jamaica, and how was I going to get back to Jamaica, past the U-boats and destroyers? The

City of Benares, full of evacuated children, was torpedoed by a German submarine in September!

I knew I couldn't go back. We'd moved to England when I was twelve, and I knew, because of the dustbin of rubbish true facts in the back of my head, that I could not live with Granny Adair. I'd have to earn my keep there by picking up stones in her tiny field of sugarcane, or herding her goats. At best, taking in washing, which in the Jamaica bush means scrubbing sheets in the river and walking six miles with a laundry basket on your head. Three years in London had ruined me for such a life. No, if I am honest, it was Mummy's fault, with music lessons and library books and her pretty tailored suits. Even in our Jamaican bungalow we'd had a piano and a veranda and a little garden of English roses. And we *left* Kingston because Mummy was afraid of the workers' strikes and the Caribbean riots. Daddy grew up in the bush, but he went to sea when he was fifteen.

At *fifteen*! My age in November 1940. You can do that if you're a boy—even a West Indian boy can do that. The rules won't let any kind of girl do that. And I was a West Indian girl.

What can a West Indian girl do at fifteen?

A girl whose parents are both killed by enemy action and who burns, *burns* to fight back? A schoolgirl with no skills who stands in the street watching the vapor trails of the fighter planes and wants to be up there with them so badly that it *hurts*?

Some of those children on the *City of Benares* were rescued from the sea. They were the ones who hung on, who fought to stay awake in the cold water and who wouldn't let go of the wreckage that kept them afloat.

I am like those children. Not the ones who sank. The ones who *fought*.

Rules are made to be broken, Mummy always told me. She believed that you can get away with breaking rules if you are polite about it, and underneath her cultured British charm my mother was the boldest of rule-breakers, a white Englishwoman who married a black Jamaican. But she was carefully polite. That's how she got around our landladies in London, with harp music and flute music and smart, stylish hats. Mummy had always been there to protect me from the rules. Now I was going to have to break them on my own.

I had to find work. At my age it wasn't going to be war work,

but I had to pay rent and buy food. Sensible positions such as “sales girl in record shop” and “music teacher’s assistant” weren’t the answer because time and again people made it clear they didn’t want to hire someone with a tropical complexion, even a pale one—light brown, dark brown, it was all the same to the English. “The Caribbean sun makes people lazy,” explained one well-meaning person as she turned me away.

And Mummy had trained me so carefully to be polite that I *thanked her* as I left.

Afterward I sat on a bench by the Serpentine and cried.

But then I found Nancy Campbell’s notice in the newspaper. Her old aunt Jane needed someone to look after her. I had to ring a number in Scotland to ask about it. And that was perfect, because over the telephone I was able to get around the rules by invisibly using my most practical, useful skill—my polite English accent.

I was surprised at how quickly my plan worked. Nancy Campbell, whoever she was, seemed ready to snap me up straightaway.

“I want two references, and you must be tidy, and able to make travel arrangements by yourself,” she told me. “I’ll send rail fare if you’re willing.”

It seemed too good to be true.

“But haven’t you other people applying as well?” I asked.

“I’ll accept the first suitable candidate who wants the position. I’ve lost count how many lasses have rung me, then changed their minds—oh, twenty, at least. No one wants to be seen with Aunt Jane, and that’s the truth.”

“Is she West Indian?” I blurted, before I could stop myself.

“No,” said the Scotswoman. “She’s German.”

German!

“She’s suspected of being a risk to national security,” the woman on the phone continued grimly. “She has to be collected from an alien detainment camp on the Isle of Man.”

A risk to national security in an alien detainment camp!

Worrying I’d hang up on her, Mrs. Campbell rushed to give me more information. “My aunt’s what they call ‘category C,’ a low-risk prisoner. She broke her hip last summer, hill-walking at eighty-two, silly woman! She needs help getting about. Not heavy lifting, just minding... and keeping her out of my way, to be honest. I have the pub to manage, and I can’t look after an invalid. Aunt Jane is far

too old to be locked up like a criminal anyway, though that's her own fault for lying about her age—she told the policemen who arrested her that she was sixty! And how she pulled off such a devilish falsehood, I can't tell you. I've a mind she *wanted* to be arrested—attention-seeking Jezebel! But the government's releasing quite a few folk they detained earlier this year. Most of them are Jewish and not Nazis at all, and people aren't happy about imprisoning folk the way the Germans do."

Mrs. Campbell paused for breath.

"Why did they arrest her?" I asked cautiously. "Besides her being German?"

"She was a telegraphist. She worked five years in a wireless exchange in Berlin when she was a girl, sending Morse code, before she became an opera singer." Mrs. Campbell added hastily, "But that was more than sixty years ago, in the 1870s. Before the telephone—plenty of young ladies did the same! It's not as if she was Mata Hari, taking messages and spying in the Great War!"

A telegraphist and an opera singer! Morse code! I thought the old woman might turn out to be quite interesting. And I wasn't scared of an old woman, even if she was German. I *liked* old women. I liked our landladies, who were kind to me when Mummy and Daddy were killed. I liked Granny Adair.

Mrs. Campbell elaborated, "Aunt Jane's no blood relation, you understand. She's my father's brother's wife. They lived a wicked bohemian life, Uncle John and Aunt Jane, in the last century—Berlin, Vienna, Paris. She was famous the world over, to hear her tell it. Her real name is Johanna von Arnim, though she's Jane Warner now."

"How is she? Can she walk?" I tried to think of any information I needed before the money for the phone call ran out. "Did she live alone before she broke her hip?"

"Yes, she had a flat in London," said Mrs. Campbell. "Uncle John had a long lease on it that expired ten years ago, and afterward the landowner rented it to them year to year. But Uncle John's dead now, and Aunt Jane's let the flat go and has no place to live. At *eighty-two*! What am I to do with an eighty-two-year-old invalid who's made her living in music halls—put her behind the bar? Oh—and you must be quiet about her being German. The pub is next to a Royal Air Force base, and the bomber lads often come here when they're not in the air."

“Does your aunt speak English?” I asked.

Nancy Campbell huffed at the other end of the telephone line. “Aye, did I not say? She married a Scotsman—they kept a London flat for fifty years! Of course she speaks English.”

I took the job over the telephone without the desperate Nancy Campbell seeing me. She was easily persuaded when I told her that Mummy had been a music teacher, and that I could play the flute and the piano. Mrs. Campbell thought her operatic auntie would like to have a musical companion.

So I filled a pasteboard suitcase with books and sheet music, and a larger one with all the winter clothes I could cram into it. I said good-bye to the landladies at Number 88 Gibraltar Road in Tooting. Then I started on my first journey all alone across the British Isles.

That journey passed in a swirl of November leaves and rain outside moving windows: train to Liverpool, overnight ferry to the Isle of Man, and another train to Rushen Camp, gray and wet, in a seaside town surrounded by barbed wire. I kept my nose in a book or pressed against the window the whole way, being polite to everyone, ignoring the stares, avoiding looking at anybody—just the way Mummy had always done when we went out together.

The prison guards were social workers, Society of Friends volunteers, they said. A young woman wearing a patched cardigan, with her hair tied back in a school ribbon, led me up the stairs in a Victorian guesthouse converted into barracks. “Are you from East Africa, perhaps? You do speak English very well. Was it difficult to pick up?”

She was as nice as possible, but annoyed me by asking the same old stupid questions, which I answered politely as usual.

“I’m from Jamaica. My mother was English.”

“Oh, Jamaica, even farther! Don’t you mind the cold? Here we are.”

She didn’t even give me a moment to answer about whether I minded the cold or not. She knocked and opened a door.

“On you go.” She waved me ahead of her.

I stepped into the room and came face-to-face with Johanna von Arnim.

The old woman sat swaddled in a mothly wool blanket. There were no curtains in her small room, which was filled entirely by the

chair and bed and wardrobe. The window glass was slabbed with dark blue paint and tape because of the blackout, so that German bombers wouldn't see a light on the ground at night. The window was open to let in daylight, and the air inside was as cold and damp as outside.

Johanna von Arnim stared at the Friends volunteer with cool, pale blue eyes. Then she turned those eyes on me, and they widened in surprise.

I held my breath, ridiculously expecting her to say something in German.

Instead, she sang an English singing game.

"Who shall we send to take her away?"

Her voice was *amazing*. It was a rich, fruity mezzo-soprano, perhaps a little quavery with age, but not at all weak or thin. The song filled the room. When she stopped singing, the air seemed to hum with the memory of it.

I used to play "Nuts in May" too, outside my primary school in Jamaica, holding hands with my friends in a circle beneath the Bombay mango tree. So I sang to her in reply.

"You'll have Miss to take you away!"

My own voice embarrassed me. It sounded like a tin whistle following a golden flute.

The old woman's parchment skin crinkled around those pale blue eyes into a silent laugh.

"Here I am," I said. I held out my hand for her to shake.

"Which corner of the British Empire do you come from, my dusky maid?" she asked, shaking hands politely.

"Jamaica. I grew up in Kingston," I said. "My mother was English."

I waited for her to compliment my English or ask me if I was cold, but she surprised me.

"Is that a flute you're carrying?" she asked. "Do you play?"

I'd left my cases at the camp headquarters, but I had the flute on its strap over my shoulder. "A bit," I said cautiously.

Mummy would have told her I didn't like to practice. I didn't want to admit this right away to a professional opera singer. Or to the only person who'd started out by showing as much interest in my flute as in the color of my skin.

"Frau von Arnim, this is Louisa Adair." The woman from the camp office introduced us. "Louisa can help you pack."

"I don't want help packing," said Frau von Arnim. "My things are my own business. But I shall need assistance to get to the bank to collect my furs."

"Your furs are at the bank?" I echoed.

"Yes, of course, we're not allowed locks. I don't trust that damned Nazi Ella Fiesler across the passage, and there are three children downstairs who stain everything they touch. They're not Nazis—they're just children. I cannot keep their sticky paws off my gramophone. If that martinet of a commander would allow us to listen to the radio, they might be less trouble, but as it stands, my gramophone is the only entertainment in the house. Open the wardrobe—you'll see. Go on, girl, don't stand there staring."

Not only could she speak English, but her English was flawlessly proper. She sounded like a radio announcer. Like a duchess. Like the Queen.

She watched me as a cat watches a bird, hungrily. I opened the wardrobe.

There was the gramophone, and next to it was a stack of records higher than my knees. Gowns bloomed like hibiscus and oleander on the rail, pushed to the back so she could reach the gramophone.

"Well, Louisa, now you've met Johanna von Arnim, help her to her feet," said the young woman from the camp headquarters. I thought she must be evaluating me.

I clasped Frau von Arnim by the forearms and braced my heels while she pulled herself up. She was a good deal heavier than she looked.

"The coat, and then the sticks—ugh, dreadful things, I look like an old spider," said Frau von Arnim. "And my bag beneath the pillow. The passbooks are behind the notes for one of the Django Reinhardts, I forget which."

"Pardon?"

"In the record album," she explained impatiently. "At the bottom, beneath the frocks. That damned Nazi Ella Fiesler would never pick up a jazz record."

Frau von Arnim got down the stairs by herself. I was relieved that she could manage stairs, but goodness, they seemed to take *forever*—she did them one at a time. The volunteer and I came down behind her. I carried her walking sticks, wondering if I should have gone first to break her fall if she went plummeting forward.

“You must have very strong arms,” I said.

“I have, girl,” she agreed.

And then a long plod to the bank, where we collected a mountain of furs. The Society of Friends woman came with us, watching how I got on. Frau von Arnim, frowning with hostility, examined each piece of fur and signed for it.

“I shall be withdrawing my savings, as well,” she announced with queenly pomp.

That was more complicated, and the bank manager took her into a private room to sort it out.

This left me alone with the detainment camp volunteer.

She grasped my arm and pulled me away from the bank manager’s office. She glanced about to be sure none of the clerks were listening, and then she spoke to me quickly, with her voice carefully lowered.

“Thank you for coming for Frau von Arnim,” she said. “She should have been released over a month ago, and frankly she ought never to have been sent here in the first place. It really is too bad! She’s well aware of why it’s taken so long for her niece to find someone to help her travel. There’s nothing worse than knowing nobody wants you.”

I nodded. I thought I understood that.

“Do keep a careful eye on her, won’t you?” said the social worker. “That fall she had on the cliffs was providential, if you ask me. We think she was planning to throw herself over the top when she made it to the edge.”

It took me a moment to realize she was serious.

Oh, heavens, did Nancy Campbell know *that* about her aunt? If she did, she’d been a bit secretive about it.

“Frau von Arnim has always been very unhappy here,” the camp volunteer explained, seeing my wary expression. “The Rushen Camp women are allowed to go about the town freely, to the shops and the cinema and such, but Frau von Arnim would keep doing things we had to put a stop to. Bathing in the sea naked—at her age! Playing records at three o’clock in the morning, purposefully hiding library books when they were due to be returned. Tossing out other people’s post! She’d say it was an accident, but she always picked out the ones belonging to people she didn’t like. And then there would have to be consequences, so she wasn’t allowed on the beach, or to the library, or to speak to the postman, and we had to

move her three times in four months, and her gramophone got taken away for a bit... just constant scrapping with *everybody*. And it always ended in us having to treat her more and more like—like —”

I was sure she was going to say *more like a prisoner*, but she surprised me.

“More and more like a very elderly woman indeed.”

The social worker paused. She had me by the arm, as if she expected me to try to escape. She searched my face, no doubt wondering if I understood her.

I thought of Frau von Arnim’s whacking great lie about her age. I put that together with what I’d seen of her in the past hour: stubborn, independent, regal and elegant, with a voice like a nightingale and a cupboard full of jazz records. She was still looking for adventure. Perhaps when she was arrested she imagined a few nights in prison before someone discovered how old she was—perhaps she imagined she would charm her guards with song, and then there might be outraged news headlines about her brave spirit and the injustice of her arrest, and people would remember her operatic past. Retired, perhaps, but not *old*.

A rule-breaker, just like Mummy.

Just like me.

“And now that she can’t walk properly, of course she *does* have to be treated like an old woman,” the social worker finished.

“I expect she’ll cheer up once she’s off the island,” I said.

“I expect she’ll cheer up now she has you to order about,” replied the social worker, at last letting go of my arm.

She smiled at me. Then she ruined it by adding ominously: “Do take care that Frau von Arnim isn’t allowed to hurt herself again.”

We had one last visit to the camp office. I was to be the Official Keeper of Documents, and there was a brief argument over my suitability for the job.

“Miss Adair is perhaps rather, um, perhaps too young?” said someone. “To be entrusted with such responsibility, I mean.”

“I don’t believe the commander would approve,” said another. “Not if she saw the girl herself.”

“But she *hasn’t* seen the girl,” protested Frau von Arnim, who was ready to leave.

What a stupid argument! I was sure it had nothing to do with

my youth and everything to do with my skin color.

I said, in my best English accent, "I should think it will be rather difficult for Frau von Arnim to manage her walking sticks and her papers at the same time."

In the end I was put properly in charge, with sheepish excuses as the Society of Friends people avoided looking me in the eye. But they apologized by making a bit of a fuss over Frau von Arnim before she left, and me as well, feasting us with scones slathered in jam and butter. "There's no rationing here!" somebody told me. "People on the mainland are envious when they find out how well the detainees eat. But we can't let it go to waste, can we? And we're not allowed to send any foodstuffs off the island. You must stuff yourselves before you go!"

I studied the documents they'd so grudgingly given me. It said *Johanna von Arnim* on the old woman's passport and her ration books and release papers. Hadn't Nancy Campbell told me her aunt was called Jane Warner now? But everyone in Rushen Camp called her Frau von Arnim. I wasn't sure how to keep her Germanness quiet, as Mrs. Campbell said I should; or even what to call her.

The mainland ferry set sail for Liverpool, and I sighed with relief as I unwrapped the sandwiches I'd bought at a kiosk on the pier in Douglas. (*Roast beef!* I hadn't tasted beef that wasn't out of a tin since the war started.) Taxi, rail station, taxi, ferry, loading and unloading everything at each stop, helping Frau von Arnim in and out of vehicles and up and down from platforms—hauling all the travelling cases along with us again, hers full of record albums and mine full of books. There was the gramophone, too. We had to wear the furs; I felt like a trapper. Had Nancy Campbell suspected the fuss? She must have.

But at last I had a chance to breathe, with a long night at sea ahead. We weren't in a cabin, but the ferry lounge was more comfortable than the train, and Frau von Arnim's furs were incredibly warm and surprisingly light. I had never worn anything so soft. Johanna von Arnim sat straight and elegant in her own beaver coat and fox stole, with her back to the Isle of Man as we steamed away from it. Her thin powder-white hair peeped out beneath her fur hat, and her watery blue eyes gleamed as if they were wet.

"Good riddance to that godforsaken place," she said abruptly.

"Tell me, my dear, how does a Jamaican schoolgirl end up traipsing across Britain with a released German detainee?"

I swallowed. I hadn't yet had to *tell* anyone about Mummy and Daddy being killed—my landladies were there when it happened, and it was nobody else's business. Mrs. Campbell hadn't even asked.

"I needed work," I said evasively.

"No people of your own to go to?"

"Not here," I said.

I bent over my cup of tea.

"You're dreadfully young not to have any people," said Johanna von Arnim.

I didn't want to talk about it.

But I'd just make it worse for later if I was mysterious. It wouldn't be the last time I'd have to tell someone, even if it was the first.

"My parents were killed by bombs last month," I said. "In the same week. Not in the same place. My mother, she was called Carrie, Caroline Adair—she—she was riding in the front of a bus that fell into a crater when Balham tube station was bombed. You might have seen the pictures in the papers."

"No, we aren't allowed newspapers," the old woman said gently. She cocked her head to favor her left ear, listening carefully over the ferry's engines. "How terrible, and how unhappy you must be! Were you in the accident?"

I shook my head. This I *couldn't* talk about—that I hadn't been along. I hadn't been there when it happened, I hadn't been there when Mummy was taken away in the ambulance, I hadn't been there when she died all alone in the hospital four days later. No one needed to know that. No one could fix that, and I didn't want anyone to pretend to try.

"My father, Lenford Adair, was a merchant seaman on a ship that was torpedoed three days after my mother died," I said carefully. "I didn't find out until about two weeks later. Poor Daddy! I don't know if he knew what happened to Mummy. I sent a telegram, but it might not have reached him. I can't decide if I hope he did know, or if I hope he didn't." I swallowed again. "Hundreds of men drowned. He hadn't been let in the Royal Navy because he wasn't born in Europe, but the German U-boats don't seem to care whether it's a navy or civilian ship they're sinking—"

I choked on my words, my face and eyes burning.

"I'm sorry!" I gasped. "I didn't mean it to sound like anyone who's German—"

"It didn't," she said. "And the U-boats don't. Well done, Lenford Adair! Those merchant seamen are just as heroic as the military seamen, even if they're not in battle. I'm sorry they wouldn't let your father in the navy. There's nothing more frustrating than having an open door slammed in your face."

It reminded me of what the social worker said: *There's nothing worse than knowing nobody wants you.*

"And grief is a burden you can never put down," said the old woman. "Though it gets easier to hide. I've been alone for three years. It doesn't feel very long." She suddenly sounded stubborn. "It *isn't* very long. It never stops hurting. You learn to bear the pain."

"Do you?" I asked longingly, caught off guard by her intimacy and kindness.

She shrugged her thin shoulders. "It depends on where you are and what you're doing."

The social worker's warning nagged in my head. *Do keep a careful eye on her, won't you? Do take care that Frau von Arnim isn't allowed to hurt herself again.*

We'd finished our sandwiches. The old woman drooped and was instantly asleep, snoring lightly against my shoulder.

I didn't blame her. I couldn't remember ever being so tired in my life. Johanna von Arnim's sleek head pressed against me like a bag full of concrete. It hadn't been easy, talking about Mummy and Daddy. I let the tears come quietly and didn't make a noise. It was comforting to have the old woman's head lolling heavy and trusting against my shoulder.

I thought it would be impossible for her to steal off and throw herself into the Irish Sea without waking me up, so I gave up trying to keep my own eyes open.

I recognized the drone of German planes even in my sleep. I dreamed I was standing in Balham High Road back in London, staring at the sky. It was blue and empty, and I wasn't worried about being attacked. I was happy and excited, as if I were going to a party. I could hear the thudding engines all around and I held my breath, longing for the air battle to begin. I couldn't wait to cheer on the Spitfires and Hurricanes as they cut up the sky with their vapor trails.

Then I remembered what the bombers would do to Mummy, and woke myself with a sob.

The engines were real. The German air force, the Luftwaffe, was bombing the Liverpool docks. The ferry lounge lights had been switched off, but the ship steamed onward with a kind of grim determination that reminded me of Mrs. Campbell on the phone.

I jumped up and peeked beneath the blackout curtains. We hadn't far to go, but fire lit the low black land. The ship rocked, and I thought of U-boats and torpedoes. We were helpless. Had Daddy felt this way, waiting for his ship to sink? I couldn't believe it. He must have had a job to do, right up to the instant he was killed.

I thought I would choke to death with wanting to fight back, to join in, to make a difference, to *do something*.

Johanna von Arnim slept peacefully, snoring gently.

Well, *she* was my responsibility. Looking after her was my wartime job right now, and it was too bad if it wasn't very exciting or even very patriotic. I sat down beside her again and sighed. It wouldn't matter anyway if our ship sank on the way to Liverpool.

But mercifully it didn't, and by the time we docked the raid was over. I hauled the cases and gramophone onto land as the all-clear sirens hooted. My wartime job was going to keep me fit, whatever else happened.

We spent hours in the city police station getting her registered, and then in the railway station at Liverpool Lime Street queuing to buy our tickets.

"Identity documents, miss?" the ticket seller asked, eyeing me suspiciously, when I finally got to the front of the line. I felt conspicuous in the fur coat.

Be polite, Lula, warned Mummy's calm, comforting voice in my head.

I gave a false, bright smile. "Oh—yes, sorry. I haven't had to show ID to buy a rail ticket before." Of course I hadn't. No one has to. But I dug in my school satchel for my National Registration card anyway.

"Please step aside so you don't hold up the queue," said the ticket seller coolly.

My heart plummeted as I bit back rising anger. It is hard to stand your ground and politely break rules at the same time. Why hadn't I parked Frau von Arnim with the luggage instead of shuffling everything along in the queue with us? If we lost our place

I'd have to shift it all again—

The old woman reached over me with an official-looking booklet open to a smiling photograph of her own face. The ticket seller nodded and pushed the passport back.

"Apologies, madam, I didn't realize you were together." He smiled at her over my shoulder.

"Well, we are," said Frau von Arnim. "Two singles for Stonehaven." She added in a friendly way, "We are visiting my niece in Scotland."

My face burned as the horrid man thumped our tickets with the date stamp. I paid without saying anything.

"Thank you," said the old woman as we turned away. But she might have been talking to me.

Afterward we sat in the ladies' waiting room, surrounded by our piles of luggage, until it was time for our train.

"What did you show that man?" I asked. I was supposed to help her with her papers, and here was something she'd kept to herself.

The old woman gave a slow, shy smile, as if she were the one who was a bit embarrassed this time. She handed over the booklet and let me look at it.

It was an ordinary British passport, more ordinary than mine, even, because mine says JAMAICA across the front below BRITISH PASSPORT. The smiling photograph pasted inside was definitely a recent picture of the person sitting next to me—at least, it wasn't taken so long ago you couldn't tell who it was. But the name read clearly, *Jane Warner, British subject by birth*.

It also said she was a musician. And it said she was born in Aberdeen, in Scotland, in 1868, ten years later than the date on Johanna von Arnim's alien registration card.

"You can call me Jane," said the old woman. "It's what I call myself."

I stared at the lying document, then looked up at the person who called herself Jane. The shy smile was gone. She watched me seriously, trusting me with a secret.

"How did you get this?" I demanded. It came out sounding very stern, and her thin shoulders cringed a little. Perhaps she was expecting me to take it away from her. That's what they'd have done at Rushen Camp if they'd known about it.

"It was my husband's," she said defiantly. "I kept it when he died. It wasn't until I was already locked up in that miserable place

that I started fiddling with it. Of course they knew who I was, but I've called myself Jane Warner since the early thirties.... And who doesn't look forward to a better life ahead? I thought I should be ready if the chance arose. It was simple to fix—a razor and ink is all it took. Rubbing the raised stamp onto the photograph was the difficult bit.”

She was more of a rule-breaker than I'd realized.

“You really ought not to use it,” I scolded her. “You could get into terrible trouble.”

She laughed. “What do you think they would do? Put me in prison? At my age? Imagine!”

“It would be worse than the camp,” I argued.

“I was in prison for three weeks before I went to the camp, so I know what it would be like,” she told me.

I gazed at the glamorous smiling face of the elderly, but younger, woman in the fake passport.

“You don't need to show identification papers to buy a rail ticket,” said Jane Warner. “That man was a bully. He was bullying *you*.”

“I know he was bullying me,” I said. “People often do.”

I'd been saved by an old German woman! Suddenly I laughed too. “Stupid bossy official! Aren't there enough rules already? I wish we could report him for making up extra ones.”

“Never mind,” said Jane. “There's no danger to national security, and we have our rail tickets. If he goes on making up extra rules, the stupid bossy official may get himself in trouble without our assistance.”

I gave her back her husband's doctored passport.

“This is going to expire next year,” I pointed out.

“I'll worry about that next year,” said Jane.

I rang Mrs. Campbell from the red telephone kiosk by the bus shelter on the Aberdeen road. That was as far as we could get to the village of Windyedge without having to walk, and Mrs. Campbell said she'd arranged for someone to come in a car to collect us.

It felt like the end of the earth. I remembered, in a flash, a time when I'd been very small, following a path in the bush behind Granny Adair's tiny ramshackle house, and suddenly everything seemed strange. I was alone among the giant ferns and banana trees and huge Anansi spiderwebs, and I panicked. I wasn't lost—I

shouldn't have been afraid. But I was terrified. I turned around and ran screeching back down the path to Granny Adair's familiar shack and henhouses.

I felt a bit like that now. Only the bus shelter, the telephone kiosk, and a small postbox sunk in a stone wall showed it was the twentieth century. All around were brown winter fields dotted with sheep, a brown hillside wreathed in low clouds, and unhappy blackthorns stooped by sea wind. There weren't even any *signposts*. They'd all been taken down to confuse the Germans if they invaded. Smoke rose from the invisible village down the lane, almost a smell of tobacco, because they were burning peat, not coal—just as they'd done for thousands of years. Beyond the smoke stretched the sea, the cold North Sea.

But Mrs. Campbell had said there was an aerodrome nearby, for a Royal Air Force bomber squadron. The airmen came to her pub. Perhaps I'd see some of them there, young British men returning from combat over the North Sea.

The longing I felt when I watched an air battle swelled up in my throat again until it was drowning me. What in the world was I going to do here, or learn to do here, to help win the war? Looking after Jane Warner would keep me from starving, but it wasn't going to lead to anything else, was it?

My chest grew tight with the same kind of panic I'd felt in the green strangeness of the Jamaica bush.

But I couldn't turn around and run screeching home this time. Neither one of us could.

Volunteer Ellen McEwen:

There's always someone telling you to move on if you're a Traveller. There's always someone calling you dirty or sly, or slamming a door in your face. *Filthy sleekit tinker*. That's what I live with, and not just me, but all my family too. Then the war came along and gave me a chance to be someone different.

It wasn't that folk changed the way they felt about us, mind. It wasn't some la-di-da virtuous "fighting a common enemy" rubbish. It was just that once I was in uniform, folk couldn't tell where I'd come from.

The war began when I was eighteen, and my twin brother and I joined up at the same time early in 1940. Euan went for a soldier and was sent to France, but a lass like me wasn't going to have to shoot at people. I became a driver for the ATS, the Auxiliary Territorial Service. I was proud to do it, and I had steady wages I could share with my mam and dad if they told me a post office to send it to.

When I finished the training course and was assigned to be the driver for an RAF aerodrome, no one at my new RAF base had the least idea where I'd come from. Scotland, aye, that was clear, but the English erks and airmen didn't know I was a Traveller. I became a gadgy dilly like the other girls, living under a roof and wearing a uniform, and no one but me kent I'd rather be sleeping in a camp tent.

And I kept quiet about it.

At first it wasn't on purpose. But when I realized folk weren't bothered about me, I was careful not to let them know. A fresh start. No need to stir up trouble, aye? There was no women's barracks at RAF Windyedge, so I was billeted at the Limehouse, Nancy Campbell's pub in the village, and she didn't bat an eyelash over me staying there. She was just the crabbit sort who wouldn't take well to a fiery-haired, long-legged Scots Traveller lass staying under her roof, but she tolerated me well enough. It was grand being tolerated instead of shunned.

Better than that, at the airfield and in the pub, it was grand being liked by the RAF lads and trusted by their commanders. It's true that Jamie Stuart knew who I was. We were both at RAF Windyedge late in the summer of 1940. But he was an old friend and didn't give my game away. He had his own posh family that he tried to keep quiet about, being the laird's son educated at Eton and all that. My mam and dad used to camp on his granddad's land.

We were lucky to be close by, and I missed him when 648 Squadron went up to Shetland—I worried about him the way I worried about my own twin brother.

But apart from the worry, if I'm honest, the war so far made me grow a mite comfortable in ways I'd never expected. I didn't think about the future—how did anyone? Should I go back to my own folk, would I marry, could I make a living? No one needed to decide any of that now, not when we might all be speaking German in another year! I might as well enjoy myself in my wartime job, enjoy being just the same as other folk.

And then in November 1940, it all turned over. After November 1940, I couldn't be so comfortable.

It started with Nan Campbell asking me to do her a favor on my way back from delivering a load of engine parts to Deeside near Aberdeen. She had two guests arriving to stay at the Limehouse and needed help getting them there. One was Jane Warner, Nan Campbell's ancient auntie who had broken her hip and had to walk with two sticks. She'd just come out of hospital and had no other place in the world to go. The other was the girl Nan hired to help her auntie make the journey, and to look after her a time. Could I collect them in the Tilly from the nearest bus stop, Nan asked—the Tilly was the Hillman Minx van I had charge of, converted for carrying bags of stuff or a troop of men, with wooden benches in the back under a canvas top. Nan's old auntie had brought piles of luggage and couldn't possibly walk two miles to the Limehouse.

I said I didn't mind, and when I got back from Deeside, there was the old woman waiting with her young assistant at the bus shelter on the Aberdeen road. They did make me laugh, all among their furs and their cases, when I pulled up! They looked like a pair of imperial Russian princesses running away from the Red Revolution.

The hired lassie gave me a surprise, for her smooth skin was the pale brown of milky tea or the inside of a fiddle. I wondered if

crabbit Nan Campbell knew she'd hired a black girl. It had all been done over the telephone and in the post, and if this lass was anything like me, she might not have said. It's easiest not to say, if you're trying to get work. Unlike me, she wasn't going to be able to hide her secret for much longer.

She was a pretty young thing, neat and small, with a heart-shaped face that looked a mite fed up at the minute. She wore a sleek black mink coat that shone more glossy than her dark hair, and she had a flute case on a long strap carried over her shoulder. The poor old lady, also bundled in a pile of fur, had fallen fast asleep waiting for me to turn up. She sat perched on one of her cases, bent with her hands clasped together over her sticks, her forehead resting on her knuckles.

I parked the Tilly at the bus stop and got out to help with the luggage. The old lady jerked awake as I slammed my door shut behind me.

I'd only ever spoken to one other black person in my life, and it had been a most uncomfortable conversation. But I was going to have to live under the same roof with this one. I swallowed hard and reminded myself she was just hired help and I was an ATS volunteer. She wasn't going to start by calling me a dirty tinker, and I'd better not start by making her feel like a British Colonies outcast.

"I'm Volunteer Ellen McEwen," I said, taking great care with it. "I'm the ATS driver for RAF Windyedge. I also stay at the Limehouse."

"I'm Louisa Adair," said the lassie, sharply holding out her hand, like a challenge to fight.

I shook hands with her. Her grip was very firm for somebody so slight and so polite. I made an effort. "What a bonny coat!" I told her.

"The furs belong to Mrs. Warner," Louisa said, waving the other hand toward the old woman. "The only way we could get them here was to wear them!"

"How do you do, Mrs. Warner?" I said.

"You may call me Jane," said the old woman, with a look at Louisa that made Louisa smile, as if they were leaving me out of a joke between them.

"Jane it is, then," I said.

I took a breath and went round the back of the Tilly to drop the

tailboard so I could load up the pile of cases. It could have gone worse. Ah well!

“Och, a *gramophone*!” I sang out when I found it.

Piled on top of the biggest leather valise, to keep it off the damp ground, was a portable wind-up record player—a very good one, too, with its own loudspeaker built into a beautiful wooden case. Louisa helped me to lift it into the Tilly.

“That’ll liven things up at Mrs. Campbell’s,” I said. “You’ll be popular with the airmen when the next squadron gets here!”

I was most curious about Louisa’s dark skin, but I didn’t like to ask. I didn’t let people poke their nebs into my business, and I wasn’t going to poke into hers. What must it be like, I wondered, never to be able to hide?

I tossed all our gas masks, my one as well, and Louisa’s satchel and flute and her own two cardboard suitcases, on top of the luggage in the back, and slammed the door. God pity her, how had Louisa ever managed that lot on her own? She must have had hidden pools of strength. I could guess where the fed-up look came from.

It was no easy task getting Jane into the Tilly, either. Her old arthritic knees didn’t do any bending, and the seat in the cab was high. She couldn’t manage to stand on the running board. Louisa and I had to lift her in feet first—with our arms full of fur, it was like lifting a bear.

At last we managed it, and Louisa climbed in on my side to ride in the middle, and I climbed in behind the steering wheel. Louisa sat right up on the edge of the seat like a tiny tot so she could see over the dashboard.

“And now you are high enough to get a braw view of Windyedge as we come down the lane,” I said to them as I started up the van.

Windyedge Aerodrome sits on top of the moor above the fishing village it is named for, just south of Aberdeen. It has sat there some time, built before the Great War, in the early days of flying. About it runs a proud stone wall, with its good looks all ruined by a high wire fence topped off with barbs. The road follows the wall for a mile and a half, past lookout towers and bunkers for anti-aircraft cannons. The other side of the road is all wind-bent hedge and fields and wild woodland.

I drove through this drearysome landscape as I’d done a

hundred times before, one hand resting on the gear stick and the other lightly steering as we passed along the narrow lane. The road was dry, and the clouds seemed far away, high and rippling, a sky like a wide sheet of gray river pearls.

One black spot floated low over the North Sea like a fly on my windscreen.

I blinked.

Not a spot: an aeroplane. Such a totsy wee speck before it became frightening: before I knew how close it was going to get to me.

“That’s a German plane,” said Louisa.

“Don’t be daft!” I said. “It’s coming in to land.”

“I don’t know what kind it is,” she told me. “But I can tell them apart. I was in London all through the Battle of Britain and the Blitz.”

The plane had wings like blunt butcher’s knives, not the tapered wings of our Hurricanes and Spitfires. It screamed in low over our heads.

“That’s a German plane,” the lass Louisa insisted. “It’s a *German fighter*.”

“They’d be shooting at it if it was a German plane,” I said uneasily. “See the watchtower? There are guards there, with machine guns. There’s an antiaircraft battery just below them that you can’t see from here, and another at the edge of the cliffs.”

The old woman, Jane Warner, didn’t say anything. She and Louisa craned their necks away off their shoulders and swiveled their heads around, trying to see in back of them to watch as the plane landed. But I had to keep my eyes on the road.

We passed the aerodrome entrance and its guards’ shed. The lane gives a sharp turn there, heading downhill. Below us now, Windyedge village lowered itself cottage by cottage into its dark and narrow harbor. Down there was a post office playing at being a shop, a handful of cold-looking stone dwelling places whose thatched roofs were tied down with rope so they couldn’t blow away, and a Presbyterian chapel behind a shut door, all with small, deep-set windows to keep their inhabitants in a state of eternal darkness. Beyond the harbor lurked a little beach, but you couldn’t get to it through bales of barbed wire and concrete blocks that were supposed to keep German tanks and troops from unloading there. It felt like the most unwelcoming place on God’s earth in 1940.

You had to go into the village a ways and back up another narrow lane to get to Nancy Campbell's pub. The pub was perched above a row of four stone arches built right into the hillside, like underground lairs. Heavy oak-and-iron doors fit into the archways, and these were soundly locked and bolted to keep folk out.

"Those are limekilns," I told Louisa. "Where they used to make lime, for concrete and plaster, back in the day. That's why the pub is the Limehouse. Then they got used as a prison, for deserters in the Great War, and—"

I shut up my blethering. She didn't need to know that my two uncles had been locked up in those limekilns for a week after they got caught "trespassing" on the airfield ten years ago, in peacetime—snaring rabbits. That's my family connection to Windyedge. It doesn't fash me—it made my mam split her sides laughing when I told her I was getting paid to work there now. But I wouldn't want anyone to know.

The Tilly whinged and complained as it slowly climbed the steep lane past the old limekilns. Waiting for us at the top of the hill was the hodgepodge of granite walls and blue slate roofs of the Limehouse, like an old laird's castle collapsed into the moor. A few tall Scotch pines tossed their limbs restlessly about above it in the wet wind.

The pub sign was a painting of the four limekiln arches. Louisa gave a shudder as we pulled up in front. "I expect you'll find Scotland a great deal colder than where you come from," I said. "But you'll be warm enough inside. There are gas fires in the bedrooms."

"I'll be fine," Louisa answered through tight lips. "I've only come from London just now."

I helped to unload the old woman's things, but I couldn't stop to move them in. I was meant to be on my way back to the airfield, not wasting Air Ministry petrol running errands for Nancy Campbell. As I turned the Tilly to face about so I didn't have to reverse down the lane, I saw Louisa holding the door open for the old woman. I wondered how the brown-skinned lass would cope with Nan when they met for the first time.

Not my lookout, I thought with relief, as I headed back to RAF Windyedge.

I didn't have any idea who was in the plane that had just landed, but I didn't take Louisa's warning very seriously. It was

likely some bigwig, or prisoner even, who needed to be shuttled someplace. The airfield staff would miss me right away if they needed me.

Sergeant Norbert Fergusson was standing outside his guard's hut in front of the barrier to the aerodrome drive, watching the sky through field glasses.

I cranked down the window of the Tilly and leaned out. "What is it, Nobby?"

"Bloody Jerry just landed on our airfield," he said through his teeth.

Shaness. The oath in Traveller cant hissed in my head, though I'd taught myself not to speak it aloud. Louisa had been right. It was a German plane.

"Why didn't we shoot him on his way in?" I exclaimed.

"The ack-ack lads on the north side gave him a burst, didn't you hear? But then they stopped. He had his cockpit open, waving a big white sheet behind him, and his Luftwaffe markings are all covered up, too. Looks like he means to surrender, or something."

"Get the barrier up," I told him. "They might need me to drive somebody somewhere."

"Better you than me if there's a bloody Jerry involved," said Nobby, and raised the barrier.

I went along the gravel drive as fast as I dared. I was in two minds as to whether I ought to hurry in case I got in trouble for not being about when I was supposed to, or to go slowly so I didn't have to meet any German airmen. The Tilly's tires spat up pebbles behind me. I passed the concrete barracks and the aircraft hangar with its faded green paint, and pulled up in front of the operations building.

There was one plane on the airfield, a great gray ugly thing, wings like knife blades and high Perspex cockpit bulging on top like a giant one-eyed insect.

I could see what it was, up close on the ground. It was a Messerschmitt 109 fighter.

The Luftwaffe markings, German black cross and Nazi swastika, were covered up with white canvas sheets, bound tight and flat with strips of webbing. Two lads from Windyedge's short-staffed ground crew were standing stiffly on guard in front of each wing, holding rifles. There wasn't anyone else about—they'd all trooped into the radio room to talk to the wireless op.

I waved to the guards, but they were taking their job seriously and didn't wave back.

So then I made a great howling mistake.

When I think on it, I don't see how I could have known it was a mistake. I went into the operations building. It had been put up before the last lot, the Great War, one of the oldest ops buildings in the nation, and everywhere was a mite mazy and crumbly inside. I went looking for everybody.

The door to the radio room was open. I heard a low voice talking. When it stopped, I heard the high-pitched nagging bleep and click of a Morse code key.

Standing in the open doorway, where he could see who might be coming down the passage as well as all the folk gathered in the room, was the German pilot.

I foolishly didn't take on who he was.

I thought he was a good-looking lad—tall and clean-shaven, with close cut, mouse-blond hair. He wasn't in uniform, maybe that's why I didn't guess. He wore a dark blue roll-necked sweater, like a sailor, and a knitted scarf, underneath a long leather coat. He didn't have anything on his head. A leather bag, darker and more worn than his coat, hung on a strap over his shoulder. He stood with his booted feet parked on either side of a small wooden case, like a gramophone.

There wasn't anything about him to tell me he was a pilot, still less an enemy one.

So I came bold as brass to poke my neb in at the door, and he just took hold of my arm—carefully, like a gentleman at a ball—and when I turned to look at his face in surprise, he raised his other hand.

He was holding a narrow black pistol.

He pulled me close against his squeaking leather coat and pressed the muzzle of the pistol firmly against the side of my head.

I could not have been more easily caught if I had been a rabbit in a poacher's snare.

That was the moment when I learned *hate*.

Even more than I feared him, I hated him. I hated all Germans. I was blind with it. I couldn't move nor think, not even to fight.

And I *couldn't* fight, because now I was his hostage.

Jamie:

“Hey, Cap’n, I’m getting another of those bastard Kraut messages in Morse code.”

Chip’s voice crackled through my headset over the roar of the Blenheim’s engines.

Silver and I had a new wireless op, Chester P. Wingate—Chip for short, or sometimes Tex because he was a full-blooded American from Texas. The USA wasn’t at war, but our Tex had come over as a sparks on a cargo liner just as the Atlantic grew dangerous: merchant vessels escorted by destroyers, civilians drowned alongside navy men, passenger lines canceled. Chip was going home on a ship that was dive-bombed by the Luftwaffe off the South Foreland Light and it went down right under his feet. Chip was one of the lucky ones pulled out of the water, and when he’d dried off, he marched straight to the nearest RAF recruitment office.

He was fluent in Morse code from his radio days at sea, and he was happy to be given a gun, too, so they made him a wireless op/rear gunner. He and I came to 648 Squadron on the very same day in July 1940, but it wasn’t until November that we flew together. He’d lost the rest of his crew on that same terrible hop when Silver and I lost Colin. Chip’s damaged Blenheim had stalled and nose-dived on landing back in Shetland, and his pilot and navigator were both killed instantly. Chip, in the back, had been lucky again.

In fact Chip and Silver and I were all that was left of last summer’s Pimms Section. We’d all been lucky before, so we reckoned we’d be lucky together. God knows we needed luck.

On 18 November we were flying reconnaissance. My other two Pimms Section crews were new to me and one of them was completely new to 648 Squadron, and though we were in freshly maintained Blenheims, we needed practice at formation flying. We’d been sent out over the North Sea in broad daylight, without a fighter escort. I wasn’t happy about that, and of course I’d said so and got told off by the Old Roundhead again for arguing with my superiors.

We had guns ready front and rear, but were generally loaded up with cameras instead of bombs. Now we were overhearing these German transmissions in Morse code from somewhere. The last thing I wanted for my new flight section was to run into German planes.

"How many does that make?" I asked Chip. Behind me in the cramped gloom of the aircraft's body, perched in his bulky flight suit at the radio set, Chip had been reporting them for the last hour.

"Fourteen. Got five of 'em all at once last time."

"In code?"

"No, in *Kraut*. If it was in code I wouldn't know it was Kraut, would I?"

"Tex is physically incapable of saying the word *German*," Silver suggested. He crouched in the glassed-in nose of the plane where there was a ledge for him to lay out his charts.

"I *can* say it. I just think it's bad luck to say it in the air."

"Let me see," Silver said to Chip.

I'd told Chip to write everything down. Silver crawled out of the nose to sit beside me and reached behind the bulkhead to the radio set, and Chip passed him a sheet of paper. Silver frowned at Chip's scrawled columns of letters.

"What is this, are you trying your hand at nursery rhymes? *Funkistka putt, ichho ere nichts—funkist kaput, tich...?*"

"And Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall!" I laughed. "That's not German."

"He's written it like code, in five-letter blocks," Silver said. "Maybe you can figure it out."

With one hand on the flight controls and the other balancing the throttles, I glanced at the page and looked away again. I thought about it as I stared at the high gray cirrus cloud, five thousand feet above us even though we were flying at ten thousand feet. The sky looked like a sheet of silk spilt all over with gray river pearls, serene and beautiful. Even after five months of operational flying I still couldn't marry the pure sky with the menacing enemy radio messages coming out of it from who knows where. It felt like evil magic.

"*Funk ist kaputt*, maybe?" I guessed. "I think that means *radio is broken*."

"You speak Kraut, Cap'n?" Tex sounded more shocked than outraged.

"I don't *speak* it," I protested. "I understand a little. My wee sister went to finishing school in Switzerland, and she's always wittering away in German. Reads German novels and all. *O mein liebster Bruder!* Thinks it's cute. Does my head in."

I couldn't fly the plane, keep an eye on the new pilots just off my wingtips, and interpret German radio messages all at once. Silver helped me think. Chip was good at Morse, but not a brilliant detective.

"Radio is broken," Silver mused. "It's two planes communicating. Reconnaissance, maybe. The first message has the word *Morse* in it—I think one plane can't give or receive radio calls, and he's telling the other to transmit in code."

The last flurry of messages Chip intercepted seemed to be someone in a second plane trying, more and more frantically, to contact the first.

There didn't seem to be any reply.

"What do you think these Germans are flying?" I asked uneasily. "Clapped-out old Blenheims?"

"Ha-ha," said Silver.

"We don't want to tangle with a Luftwaffe fighter. We're close enough to Norway they could be Messerschmitt 109s."

"Let's find the guy sending the messages and call a Spitfire from Deeside to put him out of his misery," said Chip.

There was no question of tackling him ourselves—that would be suicidal, and we knew it. Our guns only fired half the distance of a Messerschmitt's.

But we could figure out where he was. With the Jerry's wireless making so much noise, we might get lucky. It would be good practice for the new Pimms Section.

One of the crews in formation with me was completely wet behind the ears, a trio of fresh-faced Australian classmates who'd come straight here from some posh school in Sydney. They were even younger than me. In our third plane were two survivors of 7 November: Ignacy Mazur, the Polish pilot who'd walked across Eastern Europe so he could get to Britain, and Derfel Cledwyn, his Welsh navigator. They'd moved to Pimms from A-Flight. I wasn't used to flying with Ignacy. He was hell-bent on shooting down Nazis and had a habit of tearing out ahead of everybody; I had to keep yelling at him to watch for the rest of us. After the shake-up, like me and Silver, Ignacy and Derfel had a new wireless op: Bill

Yorke had transferred from another squadron, and we didn't know how good he was.

So getting a position fix on a German plane would test our new wireless operators, Bill Yorke and the Australian lad, Dougie Kerr. And if it worked it would give Ignacy Mazur the satisfaction of sending someone to chase down a Nazi fighter without putting my youthful Aussie lads in too much danger—the perfect practice op. Although it was real enough, even if we were practicing.

Funny how it's easier to remember who was *alive* and flying with you on a hop than to count the ones who died in the air around you.

So we hatched a plan to snare this German plane.

Ignacy and Derfel raced off toward Norway to try to receive the transmission from a different place. I told Harry Morrow, the new pilot, to stay with me—the Australians had not a whiff of combat experience among them, and if it came to an air battle I meant to get them out alive or die trying. Our two planes circled beneath the pearly sky until we'd had three more German radio transmissions, stronger and stronger each time.

Bill Yorke, in Ignacy's plane, heard it too. When his navigator, Derfel, told us where they were and where the noise was coming from, clever old David Silvermont plotted a web of lines and gave us coordinates for where he thought the Luftwaffe plane might be.

But bloody Ignacy wasn't satisfied with calling up Spitfires from Aberdeen to finish off the German.

"Pimms Leader, hello, I am going to meet him," said Ignacy's voice over my headset.

"You damn well won't!" I told him. "Get back here with the rest of us."

"He'll be surprised," said Ignacy.

This was mutiny and suicide rolled into one, and of course I couldn't let him go alone.

So with my wet-behind-the-ears Australian sprogs on my port wing, we set off after Ignacy.

I was sure he would get there before us. But I flew full throttles anyway. Chip was up in his gun turret now; no point in sitting in the belly of the plane at the radio where he couldn't see anything, listening to dah-dit beeping in German, when he could be firing guns. The Luftwaffe plane wasn't saying anything new anyway. Silver showed me the last sequence Chip had taken down:

WOBIS
TDUKA
NNSTD
UMICH
HOERE
N

Wobis, wobist? Wo bist... Wo bist du, like Old English, like Chaucer. Where beest thou?

Wo bist du, kannst du mich hoeren?

I gnawed at it as I flew, trying not to think about Ignacy and his underpowered guns.

Where are you... canst thou me hear?

Can you hear me?

Ich hoere nichts.

I hear nothing.

It sort of got me in the stomach. I wondered what had happened to the other plane. Poor lonely Jerry, losing his wingman. I knew how that felt.

We found the pilot who was transmitting, though. We even got there before Ignacy.

The Luftwaffe pilot was alone, as we'd guessed, flying a Messerschmitt 109 fighter dangerously low over the sea, skimming the whitecaps. He circled and climbed and descended again, which was why his messages faded in and out. He was looking for something, a wreck, or a trace of his companion's crash, maybe.

It wasn't even a fortnight since 7 November. And here in front of me, getting nearer, were iron-gray wings like knife blades, emblazoned with black Luftwaffe crosses, and with the ugly whirl of a black swastika on the tail.

He saw us and began to climb to meet us.

Silver and I both spotted him—but I was the one with the guns in front.

There wasn't enough cloud to hide in. The only thing we could do was get down, but you can't hedgehop over waves and expect the sea to camouflage you the way valleys and woodland and riverbanks do.

Well, this was probably it, then....

I rammed the controls forward under full power, turning and diving. I'd out-turned a Messerschmitt 109 once before, even if I

couldn't outfly or outshoot them—the Jerry probably didn't know that, and if he went after me he might leave the Australian lads alone....

The blasted Australians thought this was a game, their first dogfight. I could hear their pilot, tall Harry Morrow, whooping with excitement as they fired away at the German pilot. They didn't hit him, though. He swooped up over us, made a wide turn, and came back in over the Australians from behind. I could see tracers flaming from the Luftwaffe cannons and from Dougie Kerr's gun turret. I threw the Blenheim around and leaned into my own guns.

It sometimes doesn't feel real when you're there. You're so focused on flying and firing. Afterward, you feel choked up or frightened—especially if it's gone badly, and you have miles of empty sea to cross in a broken plane, and your mates are dead. But in battle, there's nothing else to think about.

Suddenly the Messer just stopped playing. He shot off east as if he couldn't be bothered to waste time with us. I don't think he was out of ammunition; he must have been low on fuel. He'd probably already been pushing his luck, with all that haring about after his missing wingman, and now he couldn't risk the toll an air battle would take on whatever was left in his tanks.

Thank God—*thank God*. Thank God I hadn't lost these kids on their first operational mission.

By the time Ignacy found us we were alone and heading home under the pearly gray sheet of sky.

"You blooming great fool, Mazur, you're on report," I snarled at Ignacy over the radio.

"Save it, Scotty," said Silver gently through the intercom, which Ignacy couldn't hear. "Wait till we're on the ground."

I was seething. I took a deep breath.

"Get back in formation, Pimms Section."

That was the only order they paid attention to all afternoon.

I wondered briefly if the lost Messerschmitt pilot had been disobeying orders too. But only briefly; that was someone else's problem, and Pimms was mine.

Louisa:

Look at that lion kill. That's what I thought Daddy said to me, pointing out the bus window along the road to Granny Adair's, on the edge of St. Andrew Parish back in Jamaica. I was only little, sitting on one of his knees and wedged against the window by his canvas duffel bag on the other. Around us were people with luggage and groceries and chickens, and the smell of sweat and tobacco. Daddy pointed to the limekiln every time we passed it, and I always thought he said, *That's an old lion kill.* I thought that abandoned stone-and-brick building, half-buried in ferns, was a place where brave and terrible people took lions to be slaughtered. Whenever we went to Granny Adair's and passed that place it gave me a queer, nervous thrill of fear and mystery.

The limekilns at Windyedge village made it all come back. Just when Ellen said that—*Those are limekilns.* And again when she left us, as I looked up at the pub sign with its painted limekilns. The back of my neck prickled chilly, even beneath Jane Warner's warm fur coat.

I wasn't a fool-fool country gal and I knew they were just limekilns. But maybe it was the German plane that gave me the shivers.

The Limehouse had a small porch made of black-painted tree trunks framing the front door. Through that was a vestibule with a coat rack and two more doors leading into the hotel hall if you turned right, or into the public bar if you turned left. Nancy Campbell stood inside the left-hand door, waiting for us to arrive.

She was a thin woman in a drably flowered pinny apron over a brown dress; her gray-streaked black hair was pulled back with diamanté clips, except for a few wisps escaping in frizzled curls around her face. When I opened the door for Jane, Mrs. Campbell held out her arms stiffly and put them around her old auntie in a quick, awkward hug.

"Aunt Jane!"

Jane planted frosty kisses on her niece's cheeks, and Mrs.

Campbell looked as if she were trying to dodge them.

"Welcome to Windyedge, Aunt Jane," Mrs. Campbell said, with that same grim determination I'd heard on the phone. "And to the Limehouse. Was the journey all right? How is your hip? Can you manage stairs?" The landlady frowned. "I'm not sure where to put you if you can't manage stairs. There aren't any ground-floor bedrooms. I suppose I could convert the dining room, as I haven't served there since the war started...."

"I can manage perfectly, Nancy. I just need someone to carry my things."

I was doing that now, bringing in suitcases. I struggled through the vestibule and realized Mrs. Campbell was staring with her mouth open. I felt the blood rise flaming in my cheeks. I wasn't going to pretend it was all right for her to stare. I was used to being stared at, but she was going to be my employer.

I put down the cases with a thump, straightened, and held out my open hand to the landlady.

For another moment the thin woman's face looked baffled. Then her mouth tightened as she realized who I was. "Oh!"

She took my hand, though. She gave it one light shake and let go. She looked me up and down with her thin lips pressed shut, assessing me. I was wearing one of Mummy's neat tailored suits beneath Jane's mink coat, my hair rolled tight against my head, and I knew I looked all right.

"Where have you come from?" she asked me.

"London," I answered again without thinking.

Her thin mouth tightened even more.

"I mean—that's where I've been living," I added hastily. It's true I was annoyed about the staring, but I hadn't meant to be cheeky. "I've been in London for three years. That's where I saw your advertisement. I grew up in the West Indies."

The prickly woman's voice was cold. "You might have said. On the telephone."

"My father is from Jamaica," I confessed now, as if it weren't ruddy obvious.

"Ah, that explains it," said that miserable landlady. "I don't like surprises."

"I can go, if you like," I told her. "Now that I've brought your aunt here."

I did not want to be rude or have a fight. I did not want to go

back to London and start looking for work all over again. But I was tired of the messing about. We might as well be clear.

"You can find someone else to help you if I won't do," I added.

Jane put a stop to this conversation.

"Of course you will do." She laid her hand on my arm, as if she were hanging on to me for support. "Louisa and I understand each other. I shouldn't want a new companion after we've had such a nice time travelling together."

A nice time travelling together! I nearly smiled.

Mrs. Campbell *did* laugh, a dry snort that told me she wasn't fooled about what kind of a journey we'd had. But she didn't ask me to leave.

So I brought in the rest of the luggage. Then I got to look at the inside of the Limehouse. I'd never set foot in a pub before. Even Mummy and Daddy wouldn't have gone into a pub together, and certainly not with me tagging along.

The floor of the public bar was gray flagstones and the walls were whitewashed, with deep-set windows like the ones in the Windyedge village cottages. The bar had a brass countertop. Oak beams, black with age, held up the low ceiling above the bar. There was a scatter of tables, wooden benches and stools, and one or two proper chairs with armrests and cushions on the seats. On one side of the room, between two windows, was a battered upright piano; across from it, beside the bar, rose a chimney over a big fireplace. There was no fire burning in the grate.

The place wasn't welcoming just now. But it wasn't unfriendly. It was empty and waiting. It might be nice, if there were people drinking at the bar, and the fire were lit, and there were music.

I wondered where a girl like me would fit into that picture.

Mrs. Campbell's eyes widened again when she saw Jane's luggage.

"I thought you were only allowed one case at—at *that place*. There's no surface for the gramophone in Room Number Five, and anyway I've put the wireless in there for you."

"Oh, surely the gramophone can stay down here?" Jane suggested winningly. "And the records? I understand the lads from the aerodrome spend time here—perhaps they'd enjoy hearing some music."

Jane put down her sticks and dropped herself quite suddenly onto a chair.

"You said there were stairs," she said. "I'm just having a rest before I tackle them. Louisa, open that smaller case. I've brought a gift for Nancy."

Inside it, wrapped in silk underwear like a pass-the-parcel, were five cheeses and six blocks of butter. Jane had smuggled dairy products off the Isle of Man in her knickers! I definitely did not see her packing them.

"There wasn't any rationing in That Place, darling, and I know you struggle because of the blockades, so I brought some contraband."

Mrs. Campbell let out another burst of dry laughter. "My word. All that butter! You haven't changed a bit, Aunt Jane."

She hadn't exactly said thank you.

"Nor have you, Nancy," said Jane gently, as if it couldn't be helped.

Room Number Five was at the end of the upstairs passage. Mrs. Campbell called it the "second-best double room."

"I've put my own wireless radio in there," she told us again grudgingly, "but you'll both have to share the bathroom with the lasses. There's only Volunteer Ellen McEwen just now, the driver for RAF Windyedge. When there's a squadron based at the aerodrome there are sometimes others. You'll have to take a torch or a candle when you use the stairs at night, as it's impossible to fix blackout over that tall window in the hall. I've taken out the bulbs from the electric fittings to stop anyone switching on the lights by accident."

It was all cold. The stair was covered with faded coconut matting. This brown dull stuff underfoot had been green and alive once, palm trees blowing in a tropical sky. Far from home like me. Except that nobody stared at coconut matting. It was ordinary.

But Room Number Five was all right. It had three of the deep-set windows, one small one like an arrow slit facing northeast toward the airfield, and two facing southeast. With great relief I set down the case of Jane's that I was carrying. I didn't think it would be too bad being here, even if it was cold and dark, because I liked Jane despite her being German, and there was a piano downstairs, and the gramophone. I leaned across one of the bigger windowsills in the room, and I could see the North Sea like a strip of Christmas tinsel on the horizon. Far off in the distance, somewhere on the way to Norway, the sun was shining.

If the aerodrome gets busy, I thought, perhaps there will be other young people about.

There was already Ellen McEwen. She couldn't be much older than me. But she seemed it, in her crisp khaki uniform and tie, driving the Royal Air Force van so casually. It made me quite envious, remembering. Also, she was a tall and rather striking beauty, with shining coppery hair coiled beneath her uniform cap. She could have been on a recruitment poster. She'd made me feel mousy and shy, which wasn't helped by her being a bit stiff.

Or was she shy as well, and the uniform let her hide? She'd been perfectly welcoming. I'd have to make an effort to be friendly. I could ask what happened to the German plane after it landed. Perhaps she could take me to see the airfield sometime.

Mrs. Campbell waved toward the armchair, and Jane sat with one of her thunderous backward plunges, letting gravity drop her.

"How cozy this shall be when the fire's lit," Jane said.

The open hearth was plugged up and fitted with a gas fire exactly like the one Mummy and I had in the attic at Number 88 Gibraltar Road.

"We're lucky to have town gas and electricity," Mrs. Campbell said. "They brought it to the village the same time as the aerodrome, five years ago, when they stepped up Royal Air Force training here. I don't allow the rooms heated before three p.m. and there's no hot water before six. You've got your own gas meter for the fire—it only takes shilling coins."

"We had one like it in London," I said.

"Well, then you'll know to treat it respectfully. If you don't top up the money, the gas cuts off, and the fire will go out. Then if you forget to turn off the gas tap, next time you put a coin in, the room will fill with gas until you turn off the tap or light the fire again. I don't want any explosions! It takes another shilling every two or three days if you're careful. And don't stuff it full of coins before the collection man comes to reset the meter—once the coin box is full you can't get more gas until he empties it."

"Yes, that's how ours at home worked," I said.

"Well, be careful." She slipped a silver shilling into the meter. "Here's a bob to start you off. Don't turn it on until three o'clock. If you want a fire before then, you'll have to sit in the bar."

Oh, what a grouch.

But Jane caught my eye like a naughty child. I was sure she was

trying to make me laugh. I looked away quickly.

I *did* like Jane.

How lucky I am to like her, I thought as we unpacked. We each got a windowsill to stack our books in; she had as many as I did.

"I shall look forward to reading yours," she said. "I'm tired to death of my own."

Room Number Five, the Limehouse, I realized, wasn't a big change from her room in the alien detainment camp. Apart from the radio, of course. There was a bit more space, but now there were two of us. She'd had a bed to herself before. Now she had to share with me.

Would she mind? Would it be *worse* than the camp—would she feel she was being guarded all the time, with not even any privacy?

"I could sleep in the chair," I said, hesitating to set Mummy's Bakelite alarm clock next to the bed in case Jane didn't want me to sleep with her.

"Nonsense, what a ridiculous idea," said Jane. "The bed is large enough for a family of four. You will have to sleep by the window, as I often get up in the night."

I hesitated. "Won't you want me to help you?" That would be the worst thing about always being watched.

"I can manage the toilet perfectly well on my own, as you know," Jane answered.

In London I'd got used to sharing a bed with Mummy, except when Daddy was home, when I would gladly move to the settee for two nights or a fortnight or whatever it was. All through the last horrid weeks of 1940 I'd felt very alone in Mummy's bed all by myself. I was glad Jane didn't mind.

She wanted me to see to her gramophone downstairs.

After we unpacked we went down to the public bar, where Mrs. Campbell said it would be warmer, and where I was hopeful of toast. Sure enough, the peat fire in the big hearth was alight, and there was a small table and a comfortable chair pulled close to it. Mrs. Campbell didn't say it was meant for her old aunt, but I thought it probably was. Jane hovered near my shoulder, leaning on her sticks as I found a place for the gramophone on top of the piano.

"The loudspeaker needs to face the room," she directed.

Of course it did, silly me. I shifted the case around.

"And the records over here..." There was a low, narrow cupboard beside the piano with a mostly empty shelf holding a few glossy magazines.

Jane was particular about how she wanted the records arranged. I didn't mind—it gave me a chance to look through them. There was a lot of jazz from the early 1930s, a bit of classical. A few pieces made my throat close up, thinking of Mummy playing them: Mozart's 21st Piano Concerto in C, Debussy's "Clair de Lune."

At last Jane settled into the chair by the fire. After I'd tucked her woolly blanket in around her legs and laid her sticks out of the way, I stood back and got my first good look at the old fireplace.

Thick black beams held up the mantel, and more thick beams braced the chimney where it went through the ceiling. The black wood was split and cracked, and in the cracks, thin pieces of metal were wedged like studs. Most were black with soot or green with age. But a few still gleamed silvery and coppery, and I could see they were coins: the ones in the front of the mantel looked like pennies and tuppences. Others were wedged so far into the wood and so discolored that you couldn't tell what they were, or how old.

It was a bit unsettling. It gave me the same chill as the limekilns, and I didn't know why.

The knobbly, uneven column holding up the low ceiling at the corner of the bar was another tree trunk, painted black, like the tree trunks holding up the porch outside. It was also studded with coins, though not as many. And there were more coins in the black beam that crossed above the bar. All those gleamed, as if someone buffed them regularly with vinegar and salt. They looked like modern sixpences and shillings.

I ran my fingertips over the pennies in the mantel. That's what I was doing when Nancy Campbell came out through a door behind the bar.

"That's dead men's money," she snapped. "Leave it."

"Of course no one's altering your decorations, Nancy," said Jane tartly.

I took my hand away and, though I was probably more annoyed than Jane at the idea I might be mining for gold in the mantelpiece, I gritted my teeth and bit my tongue again, determined not to create a stir on my first day. Also, I was curious about the coins.

"Dead men's money?" I repeated.

In fact Mrs. Campbell was busting to talk about it. She was just

so tight-lipped she didn't know how to start a conversation politely.

"The wood in here is all from a wishing tree. It's older than the Limehouse," she said. "Folk made wishes on it for hundreds of years before it fell. There were pennies in the tree when this place was built, two hundred and fifty years ago. Then the airmen from the last war put their coppers in the mantel for safekeeping before they went on a mission."

She gestured toward the pennies I'd touched.

"Those lads would put in a tuppenny bit and after a flight they'd take it out and buy a pint. All these still in the wood are airmen who never came back. Dead men's money," repeated Nancy Campbell. "Wishes that didn't come true. My lads. Same age as me in the last lot."

She pointed.

"That one was Cammy McBride. Cheeky daredevil with green eyes. I pulled his last pint. It was a reconnaissance flight—he got caught in the clouds. And that was Ben Knox. His engine failed on a training flight. Just up there—"

She pulled her hand back, but not before I saw her fingers trembling. "Alan Anderson. Cannon fire from a German warship. They think. At any rate he didn't come back either."

She pointed to the coin nearest the bar, by itself at the edge of the mantel. "Mr. Campbell," she said softly. "My Duncan. His dad ran the place before I took over. I worked behind the bar for them."

Jane gave a soft little sigh. "Oh, Nancy!"

Then an unearthly shriek tore that moment apart. The hair on my spine stood on end—but of course it was just the kettle coming to a boil.

"Tea?" Jane added. "You are kind!"

Mrs. Campbell wiped her hands on her pinny and took the kettle off the hob. "I was going to have a cup anyway," she said grudgingly. "But I'll make enough for three."

She clattered about with a teapot and china behind the bar. As she left the tea to stew she turned to me and demanded, "Ration coupons."

She made it feel as if she wouldn't give us the tea without them, though I knew she just needed our tickets to get extra supplies for our meals when she did her shopping. I had to run upstairs to get them. Over the coconut matting, down the dark passage—strange to think this was my home now.

Back downstairs again, out of breath as I handed over our booklets, I looked up at the modern coins shining in the beam over the bar.

“Those belong to the 648 Squadron lads,” said Mrs. Campbell, following my eyes. “From when they were based at Windyedge.” Her hard face softened, as it had when she’d talked about the airmen from the last war. “They always prepaid their drinks. Their squadron is up in Shetland now.”

“Will they come back?” I asked.

“Let’s hope so,” said Nancy Campbell. “RAF Windyedge doesn’t feel right without a squadron at the aerodrome. Those lads at the anti-aircraft guns on the perimeter haven’t a thing to do other than smoke and play bridge and read the papers all day. Coastal Command is just asking for trouble, in my opinion.”

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Ellen:

When he pressed the gun against my head, I moaned with fear, and everybody in the radio room clapped eyes on me. They all gasped together. How could one German pilot so handily get the better of a dozen Royal Air Force ground crewmen?

“What’s he doing here?” I cried out. He hadn’t told me to keep quiet. “Why did you let him land?”

The radio operator, whom we called Old Flash because he was about ten years older than everybody else, was the only one who seemed to know what was going on.

“We had to,” he told me. “Orders. He has a code name on our list. He transmitted it correctly. Someone in Intelligence expected him.”

“What are you all doing in here, then?” I gasped.

“He’s got some message he wants me to transmit to an Intel bigwig in England. Hard to understand him—nobody speaks his lingo, and he doesn’t have much English. Everybody kind of piled in to help—and to make sure he didn’t cause any bother....”

“Aye, you did that well!” I sobbed. “He’s no bother at all.”

The German pilot let his gun drop away so it wasn’t touching my face, and his fingers stopped digging into my arm. “Shh,” he whispered soft at my ear.

I gulped air and stood tall. I didn’t think he was telling me I couldn’t speak—more hoping I would stop panicking.

“Did you get an answer?” I asked the radio operator. “From the bloke in England?”

“We’re to refuel the plane and let him go! But we’re waiting—”

And then our Flash had to take down a message that was coming in. Everybody stood frozen, listening, no one but the radio operator being able to understand the string of bleeps and blips, even though we could all hear it and it wasn’t in code. Well, it was in Morse code. But in English.

When the transmission stopped, there was a long silence while we waited for more. I could hear the German pilot breathing.

Old Flash cleared his throat.

"They're saying Robert Ethan, that Intelligence chap from the War Office, is behind it. Remember him, all in tweed like Sherlock Holmes, with the thick specs that make his eyes look like billiard balls? He was snooping around the perimeter with binoculars last month. Maybe his tame Jerry's giving him a lift to Norway. He left Intelligence a message in German for the pilot that they're going to send."

So we kept on waiting.

The German pilot never let me go. Every soul in that room believed he'd shoot me if we didn't do as he wanted.

At last the German message arrived, and the pilot pushed me across to the communications desk so he could read it, nudging his wooden case along with his foot. He eyed the page, then sighed. Whatever it said, it wasn't what he was hoping for.

For the first time since I turned up, he said something in English.

"A room?"

He pointed to me, using his gun.

"With the girls."

Everybody gasped, and, oh, how fear swelled up in my chest! A room with *girls*? Who else was there but me, and what did he need with a *room*?

He added, "The Limehouse? A room is there."

Old Flash said, "The Limehouse was mentioned in the German message. I think it said he should stay there tonight. Robert Ethan's stuck in England on a stopped train. This is his alternate plan—he wants his man to wait for him."

"Oh!" I gave a skrike of a laugh, fear and relief bundled together. "The Limehouse—with the girls. He means *Take a room in the hotel where the lassies stay*. Not that he wants—that he—*not that*."

I couldn't speak what we all thought he'd meant.

With his mate from Intelligence stranded, maybe the German pilot truly did just want a place to stop the night.

Everybody muttered. Then some cleversticks suggested, "Volunteer McEwen can drive him to Mrs. Campbell's for the night and bring him back tomorrow."

"You double-crossing bastards!" I cried.

"Don't make a fuss, you'll make it worse," said Old Flash. "We

don't want to scare him into pulling the ruddy trigger, do we? I'll check with Intelligence before you go. If it's orders it ought to be all right."

Of course I was the driver for RAF Windyedge; this *was* my job. But—they were all so flipping helpless! "Some heroes you turn out to be," I sobbed. "You bloody *bastards*."

I wriggled my arm up beneath the Jerry pilot's and gingerly pushed his gun farther away from my head. I sucked in a breath. I hated him like I'd never hated any man before in my life.

"I'll drive you there," I told him. My voice quaked. Then, because I knew he didn't understand, I said very loudly, "A ROOM. THE LIMEHOUSE." I pointed to myself and mimed driving.

No one tried to keep us from leaving—they were still in a flap worrying he might shoot me.

We waited for the last message. Old Flash nodded as he listened to the beeping stream of dots and dashes. "He's to give it till tomorrow morning. If Ethan doesn't turn up, he's to take off when it gets light, or he'll be missed back at his own base."

Flash took off his headset and turned to me. "Your Jerry's got a code name," he said. "We're supposed to call him Odysseus. He's here for a reason, whatever it is, and I don't think he's likely to wreck things for himself by hurting you." The radio operator gave me a grim wee smile, trying to be encouraging. "You'll be all right, lass."

"I'll take him straight over the cliff if I'm not," I said through my teeth.

Jamie:

“Well done, still in one piece as always,” Silver said, holding up his ratty box of rosin.

“You’re welcome,” I said.

We were back on the windblown Shetland aerodrome where we’d been based whilst fighting our losing battles for the past two months. My two other crews pulled up safely alongside our Blenheim, and Silver pushed open the hatch above us.

I climbed through the canopy and jumped off the wing. Silver followed, and Chip came behind, climbing out his own hatch forward of the rear gun turret. He stood on the wing, gazing critically at the Australian lads getting out of their plane. Then he exclaimed in his Texan drawl, “Aw, fer cryin’ out loud.”

About an inch off the top of their tailfin was shot away.

“They took a hit,” Silver exclaimed. “We shouldn’t have chanced it with a Messerschmitt!”

“We didn’t have a choice,” I pointed out.

Chip laughed. “The Kraut pilot didn’t do that. I’ll bet that new Australian gunner did it himself. Rookie mistake. You can’t fire straight behind you without hitting yourself in the rear end!”

“Look at the turret,” said Silver grimly, pointing.

One of the Perspex sheets in the dome was missing. The panel was completely blown away.

“Dougie Kerr didn’t do that himself. They took a hit,” Silver repeated.

One of the other turret panels had a small jagged hole in it. It was no rookie mistake. A German bullet had gone through one side of the dome and come out the other.

I’d nearly lost another kid.

I squeezed my eyes shut and steadied myself with one hand against the cold hull of the plane. When I opened my eyes, breathing again, I could feel the blood burning in my legs.

“Steady on, mate,” Silver said, grabbing my elbow. “Not enough porridge this morning?”

But Dougie Kerr, the Australian wireless op and gunner with the gingery hair like a bottle brush, was alive and well on the ground, and so were his tall pilot, Harry Morrow, and his baby-faced navigator, Gavin Hamilton. All three were chattering like excited sparrows to the ground crew who came to take care of the planes.

"They're all right," Silver said to me quietly. "Stop acting like an old woman, or everyone will notice."

Chip leaped off the wing of our plane and scrambled onto the one next to us to get a look at the damage to the turret dome. He let out a long whistle.

"Must have made a hell of a bang going through! That Aussie gunner had a close shave! You know what? I'll bet he didn't even notice. Probably too busy kicking himself for shooting up his own plane. If he knew he nearly had his crazy hair trimmed by a German bullet, the whole crew would be up here poking at the hole and patting him on the back!"

We pointed out the damage to maintenance, but they couldn't sort it, and told me my new lads would have to fly with holes in the tail and turret—or a quick fix of cardboard and sticky tape until the Air Transport Auxiliary could ferry another plane to us and take this one away to be mended properly.

Now I was hopping mad at the Jerries again, seeing red as I took off the bulky bits of my gear—Mae West, I mean life vest, and helmet—and fished cooled-down Ever-Hot bags out of my flight suit. I had to go be grilled by Flight Officer Pennyworth.

There wasn't anything special about that interrogation. As the rest of Pimms Section filed out to get baths and sandwiches and cups of tea, Phyllis told me apologetically, "Wing Commander Talbot Cromwell wants you in his office."

So I had to face the Old Roundhead by myself again.

He'd had a hell of a go at me after 7 November. This time I didn't blame him for wanting to have a go at me, because I knew we shouldn't have gone after a German fighter, and my new Australian flight crew had survived on blind luck, and Ignacy had essentially ignored everything I'd told him to do.

"Going to have to put another reprimand stamp in your logbook, Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart," he told me. "You'll have to get a better grip on your crews than this, or I'll replace you as B-Flight's commander. Adam Stedman in Madeira's a capable chap."

I stood in front of his desk as he defaced my logbook, clenching my teeth so hard I started to give myself jaw ache, watching his hands moving. His head was lowered, so I couldn't see any part of his face but his frowning forehead and wiry eyebrows. Of course he wanted to replace me, and this was the perfect excuse. Stedman was an easygoing, capable fellow, transferred last week from another Blenheim squadron, but he didn't have any more experience than I did, or know the new crews any better.

"Sir, with respect—" I made myself say it, polite words, without choking. "*With respect*, it'll take a couple of flights for these new pilots to learn to fly together. Mazur is a bit of a daredevil, and Morrow's just inexperienced."

"It's not their flying that's getting them in trouble," Cromwell said, deep-set eyes making his craggy face grimmer than it had any business being. "It's their big mouths. 'Careless talk costs lives' and all that. But you're their commander, so you'll have to be held responsible."

Now I was confused.

"'Careless talk costs lives'?" I repeated.

"Your young Australians were chattering like magpies about receiving Morse code in German! It's all over the aerodrome—the whole squadron knows what Pimms Section did out there today. Half of 'em are jealous and want to go shooting at Messers themselves. The other half want to know what kind of secret ops you're on. I can't have such undisciplined behavior, Beaufort-Stuart. There's a delicate operation going on, and you may have thrown a wrench in it by chasing off that Jerry."

Wing Commander Cromwell pushed my logbook across the table and leaned back. I gaped at him.

"Isn't that what we're supposed to do, chase off Jerries?" I exclaimed.

Buckets of blood! What the hell was he talking about?

"Too bad you of all men ran into this," Cromwell said. "You weren't to know. This was the one German plane we weren't supposed to shoot down. Intelligence was expecting him—hoping to collar him alive."

"Well, he's still alive, sir," I said. "We didn't shoot him down."

But an idea hit me. If there was a rogue Messerschmitt pilot on the loose, maybe he'd used the broken radio as a smokescreen. Maybe our Luftwaffe fighter hadn't been trying to contact a friend

at all. Maybe he'd been hunting down a traitor who'd given him the slip.

In that case, Pimms Section hadn't ruined some special operation—we'd *helped* by distracting the enemy.

I sucked in air, wondering whether Wing Commander Talbot Cromwell was capable of understanding this. It was guesswork, and he never took me seriously. As I hesitated, the radio operator tore in, out of breath and waving a sheet of notepaper.

He slammed the page down on Cromwell's desk by my logbook and said explosively, "It's all right, sir. We've got a message from Windyedge in Aberdeenshire: *Odysseus in port.*"

He stood panting.

I stepped forward and picked up my logbook.

"Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart, you didn't hear that," the Old Roundhead barked.

"No, sir," I said.

"Tell your men to keep their mouths shut."

"Yes, sir."

"Dismissed. Close that door on your way out."

I stood in the corridor with my back against the wall, trying to relax the muscles of my face before the jaw ache turned into a headache. It was like being in school, like failing a test on Latin verbs because I'd studied noun declensions all night. How could I possibly have guessed any of this? No one had briefed me about "Odysseus" in a special Messerschmitt 109—and how were my lads to guess that today's op was a secret when yesterday's wasn't?

I was a hundred percent on my men's side, but I wasn't sure how to get them on mine.

I steeled myself to give them a talking-to.

Louisa:

Jane and I sat by the peat fire in the public room of the Limehouse, just next to the mantel made out of the wishing tree, making the most of our first night there. I had a glass of Rose's lime because it reminded me of Mummy and Daddy, who used to drink it with rum on the veranda of our bungalow in Kingston; Jane very slowly nursed a tumbler of whisky and water.

"Ah," she sighed. "This is almost what I missed the most in That Place." She closed her eyes with a blissful smile. "Except it is really the BBC Home Service on the radio I missed the most."

I spent the evening on edge. Every old man who came into the Limehouse eyed me curiously, and I leaped to my feet every time the door opened, as if this would somehow show people that I was there on business and not as a paying customer. It made me feel doubly out of place that not a single woman came in that night. But perhaps that was because it wasn't very busy. When the last two customers from the village said goodnight, it was only half past nine—half an hour before closing—but Mrs. Campbell began to stack chairs on tables anyway. I suppose it didn't seem likely anyone else would come in so late on a weekday.

"Shall I lend a hand?" I offered.

Mrs. Campbell looked at me with suspicion again. I felt my face beginning to burn and braced myself. I hoped hard she too wasn't going to make some nasty remark about the Caribbean sun making people lazy.

Instead she said, "What age are you?"

I hadn't even thought about that. Was I old enough to be in the bar? I knew Scotland's laws were different from England's, but I didn't know how that affected me.

Rules are made to be broken.

"I am just about sixteen," I told her.

She sniffed and raised her eyebrows.

"Just about"! Well, you're willing, I'll give you that," she said in her grudging way. "Come on behind the bar then, you can do the

washing up. There's a girl from the village who helps me, Morag Torrie, but she's part-time since the squadron is away. I'm just going to sweep under these tables and then I'll lock the door."

"What about Ellen?" I asked her.

"She has her own key," grunted Mrs. Campbell.

Of course she has her own key, I thought jealously. *Important.*

"They keep odd hours at RAF Windyedge," Mrs. Campbell added. "The squadron that was here before mostly flew at night. Ellen's got to be on hand if someone needs her."

When the fire was low and the chairs were hung upside down, it didn't feel as cozy. But Jane was still bright-eyed and wide awake—I don't know how, after two nights and a day and a half of travelling. There weren't many glasses to wash up, and when I finished my little job I hung about at Jane's shoulder, staying on my feet to encourage her onto hers. Mrs. Campbell went into the entryway to lock the outside door.

As she opened the inner door leading into the vestibule, we heard the harsh noise of a motor engine straining up the steep hill past the limekilns.

"That'll be Ellen now," said Mrs. Campbell, and stepped back to wait for her to come in.

The engine stopped. There was a long pause. Then a van door slammed. Another slam followed a second later—like gunshots, the two slams cracking whiplash quick on top of each other. I knew it must be two people getting out at the same time, one on each side of the van. So Ellen had brought someone home.

She came in slowly, tall and graceful as a goddess in her khaki ATS trousers and tunic. Her hair was still coiled in its neat bun below her peaked cap, but I could see it gleaming like a copper whisky still as she turned to hold open the inner door for her guest. He walked in past her, and Ellen closed the door.

She'd brought home a young man! I wondered for a moment if she did it often, and what old Nancy Campbell had to say about *that*.

Then I saw that Ellen's face was as pale as a dead fish's belly. She hugged her ribs as if her body would fly into pieces if she let go, and suddenly I no longer envied her.

She was very, very scared.

The man who came in with her seemed perfectly ordinary. He wasn't in uniform; he wore a scarf and a sweater, like a seaman. He

carried a wooden case under one arm, with the other hand hidden deep in the pocket of his heavy coat.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Campbell," Ellen choked out. "He needs a room."

"A room," the man repeated, striding to the bar.

He was strongly built and much taller than me. He gazed up curiously at the coins in the oak beam over the bar for a few seconds. But he didn't touch them.

"A room," he repeated. "And"—he hesitated—"drink." He put his wooden case on the brass counter and mimed drinking, with his cupped hand going to his mouth.

He didn't speak much English. I held my breath, guessing what that must mean.

"He's flown from Norway," Ellen whispered.

"Norwegian?" asked Mrs. Campbell, frowning. She seemed to distrust all foreigners, but Norwegians probably ought to be made welcome. They would be refugees, escaping the iron rule of the Nazis in their invaded country.

"He's not Norwegian," Ellen whispered. "I think he's German."

She raised her voice and asked me, "You remember the plane we saw this afternoon? You said..."

She trailed off.

"It was a German plane?" I asked.

Ellen nodded.

I stared at the stranger in alarm. If this was a German pilot, this wasn't someone who'd chosen to live in England for decades, like Jane. This was a military man, fighting for Hitler, like the German soldiers who killed my parents. This was the enemy, the real enemy, right here in the room with me.

My heart lurched in fear. When that passed, it lurched again, in fascination.

He was also a pilot. *A real pilot.*

The enemy pilot swept his curious glance around the room. He paused to look at Jane. Then he looked at me, standing beside her.

My cheeks began burning again. What did Nazis think of West Indians? Not much, I imagined. They wanted everybody to be just like them. They didn't like Jews, or Gypsies, or jazz.

The stranger patted the brass bar and pointed to the glasses.

Jane spoke up.

"Come now, the young man would like a drink," she said from

her seat by the now-dead fire. "Perhaps he's come to Scotland for the whisky."

Ellen let out a nervous squeak of a laugh.

"He'd be better off in America, then, where there's no rationing," said Mrs. Campbell, putting on a defiant brave face like a Londoner in the Blitz.

The German pilot pulled his left hand from his pocket, and the hand was closed around a sleek and sturdy black pistol.

He'd been holding it all the time, a nasty secret.

I didn't dare to move.

Jane and Mrs. Campbell froze too.

But Ellen's expression didn't change. She'd known all along. She drove him here from the aerodrome, knowing that if she didn't do as he told her, he'd shoot her.

The pilot beckoned Ellen, using the pistol. She crossed the room like a whipped dog. He pointed to the beer with the gun.

"I don't ken how to draw the ale," Ellen whimpered. "Mrs. Campbell, please get him a drink."

Nancy Campbell shook herself to life and quietly let herself in behind the bar. She'd already covered the taps for the night, but she lifted the towel, screwed a nozzle back on, and picked up a clean glass. As she filled it, she made a fierce offer through clenched teeth: "Would you like a sandwich?"

The German pilot didn't understand. He rested both elbows on the counter, making his hold on the gun seem terrifyingly casual.

"What does he want?" Mrs. Campbell hissed. "I don't mean the room. He can have the room. Ellen! What else does he want?"

Ellen shook her head. A wisp of fiery hair escaped her bun, like a flame flicking her cheek. She hissed back, "How do I know? His English isn't very good, and I don't speak Jerry myself!"

Mrs. Campbell said helplessly, "Aunt Jane?"

The old woman stared at her niece with blank, pale blue eyes. She said stiffly, "I don't speak Norwegian."

"You know he's not Norwegian," Mrs. Campbell said through still-gritted teeth.

She handed the full glass to the grim young man. He took it, held it up in a salute, and drank half the pint in one gulp.

"Please, Aunt Jane," begged Mrs. Campbell.

"What do you want to know?"

"Ask him if he'd like a sandwich."

Ellen exploded in fizzing nervous laughter.

The man drank off the rest of the pint. Ellen backed up and collapsed into my empty chair, at the table across from Jane. She told us, "He's waiting for a toff from Intelligence to meet him here. If his contact doesn't turn up, he has to fly off at the crack of dawn tomorrow, and we're to let him. He's a spy, or a double agent or some such. He has a code name, they said. 'Odysseus.'"

I read a lot, I read all the time, and I knew who that was. I thought of the Trojan Horse.

So did Jane.

"'Odysseus, man of many wiles,'" she said. "From Homer's *Odyssey*."

He must have known we were talking about him, because *Odysseus* sounds much the same in English and German and I expect Norwegian too. He pointed his gun at Ellen again.

"You bloody Nazi bastard," she spat, her voice catching in a sob. "What can I do? You're the one with the gun."

He glared at her and handed his glass back to the landlady.

While Mrs. Campbell refilled his glass with beer and resentment, the German pilot crossed the room to the piano.

He took his wooden case with him. The polished blond box looked like a small gramophone, much like Jane's, but without the loudspeaker. The pilot placed his box on the piano next to Jane's gramophone and laid his gun on top of the box. The two cases looked like a mother and child gramophone sitting side by side.

With his hands free, the German opened the piano lid. His left hand pulled out a hesitant arpeggio of low notes from the keyboard.

Almost as if he were surprised to find the piano in tune, he coaxed out a few more handfuls of sound, repetitive and dark and insistent. Then he added a high, sustained trill in the right hand. It was Mendelssohn—the *Hebrides Overture*.

His fingers moved like wind over the keys, and the music was heartbreaking, heart-stopping, filling the damp walls of the old house with beauty and longing and a crashing of waves.

It was not a piece I usually think of when I think of Mummy. It is an orchestral piece. But the last time I heard it, Mummy was playing it on the school piano.

I don't remember crossing the room.

I stood next to him at the piano, tears streaming down my face, and watched his hands, long, bony, strong fingers and a plain gold

ring with a bear engraved on it, flying over the keys.

The German pilot suddenly realized I was there beside him.

He broke off playing to snatch up his pistol so I couldn't pick it up myself. The music stopped abruptly, and as he grabbed at the gun he knocked it against his wooden case.

The front of the box was a narrow, hinged flap held in place by a hasp on the flat lid, and when the gun hit the catch—it must have been loose—the front flap fell open to lay bare a panel full of holes and wires, each labeled with numbers and letters of the alphabet, like a telephone switchboard.

The inside of the wooden flap was stamped with a brand name:

ENIGMA.

The German pilot flipped the front flap back up. He had to raise the lid on top of the case a little bit to fit the catch back into place, and beneath the lid, beyond the wire panel, I saw a keyboard of ordinary typewriter keys.

It looked like a portable electrical typewriter.

He used the gun to make me step back.

Jane spoke suddenly, sharp and scolding, in a language I didn't understand.

But the pilot did.

He put the gun back into his coat pocket and stepped away from me, holding up his empty hands to show he wasn't going to threaten me anymore.

"I do speak a little German," Jane admitted grudgingly.

"I know you do," said Mrs. Campbell.

Ellen:

That brave young lassie—I'd not spent an hour in her company, and knew not a thing about her but that she had brown skin and was in London during the Blitz. But seeing her in tears at the music, and him stopping to point his gun at her, made me hate him all over again.

Nan's old auntie was calm as could be. She asked the young man a question in his own tongue. He bowed his head to Mrs. Warner and I heard the name he gave her: Felix Baer.

What was he up to, sly devil? Trying to make friends, just because a body speaks your lingo? Expecting us to behave ourselves just because he was polite? I was fuming.

But the old girl, Jane Warner, just cracked on and gave him an English lesson.

When she finished, he faced Louisa standing there with her brown eyes full of tears. His voice when he spoke was gentle and polite as a lady's maid. "I am sorry I frightened you."

"I told him about your parents," Jane said softly. "So he knows it was German bombs and torpedoes that killed them."

Her parents were killed in the Blitz? She must have hated the Nazis even more than I did.

"Oh." Louisa gave a great gulp of a swallow, and just about whispered, "Thank you."

I could see she didn't like to talk about it, and I was glad I hadn't asked.

"My mother played the piano," she added, getting control of herself. "You can tell him that, I suppose."

"Ask him if he wants a sandwich," Mrs. Campbell insisted, and then I roundly lost my temper with her. *Shaness*, could she not see Louisa's tears for herself, and all she could think of was food? I jumped up and barked, "Hold your whisht, Nan Campbell, and stop going on about sandwiches! Hitler himself could walk in here and if he was a young pilot you'd pull him a pint and stuff him full of grub! I'll get the ruddy Jerry a ruddy sandwich for you."

I barged past her into the kitchen at the back.

The kitchen was full of weapons. Everywhere I looked I saw things I could use to hurt the bastard. Cast-iron pans! A butcher's knife! Toasting forks! Blimey, I could break a milk bottle over his head if I were brave enough, couldn't I!

I could hear Jane cracking away in quiet German with the pilot, and Mrs. Campbell dithering behind the bar. "Tea, that's what we need," she said, and I heard the skritch of a match as she lit the gas burner to boil the kettle.

Aye, cups of tea—that will stop the invasion!

Stupid woman, I thought, and bit my lip. I was too frightened of the strapping tall young man and his gun to get around Nan with a frying pan and try to hit him in the head. I'd never manage it fast enough or hard enough. And anyway, I'd been told to let him get on with his mission, not to knock him out.

So I yanked open the icebox and found a big slab of butter. Where did Nan Campbell get so much butter, I wondered; does she have friends in the black market? No matter, there was cheese and bread, and I slapped a sandwich together.

When I came out of the kitchen with a tray, the lass Louisa was sitting silent and small on the piano stool. She was watching the Jerry pilot with the faintest frown. *Interested*. Not frightened. Or, if she did fear him, not showing it.

He was back at the bar, with the wooden box that he never let out of his reach, answering Jane's quiet questions.

I pushed the sandwich across the bar. The Jerry pilot wolfed it down so quickly I began to make him another without thinking.

"Oi, leave off, that's not for hotel guests!" Mrs. Campbell cried. "That's Isle of Man butter!"

I froze and gave her the worst kind of cold and fearsome glare. "And it's Scottish bread, aye? He doesn't care." I went back to buttering.

Jane held up her empty tumbler. "How very exciting this is!"

The Jerry took her glass and gave it to Nan to fill again. I wondered who would have to pay for that wee dram; whisky wasn't cheap. He passed the glass back to the old woman and they jawed some more. Then he took a silver cigarette case from inside his coat and held it out. She took a cigarette and leaned forward, and he struck a match.

Oh, the look on Nan's face when the German pilot gave her old

auntie a cigarette!

Jane called to the lass.

"He says to tell you, Louisa, that he has great respect for the American Negro. He saw Jesse Owens run in the 1936 Olympics."

"I'm not American," Louisa said, her head high.

"I told him you are a British subject." Jane smiled, her eyes wrinkling so you couldn't see the color in them. "From an island in the West Indies."

The pilot took fresh interest in the lass, his brows knotted. He asked a question, and Jane translated in a soft voice. "Do you know the music he played, the piece that made you cry?"

Louisa nodded, and glanced again curiously at the German pilot. "The *Hebrides Overture*," she said. "Scottish music by a German composer. Mendelssohn is German, isn't he?"

"Yes, but he was born Jewish," Jane explained for the benefit of us musical ignoramuses, me and Nan. "Not a Nazi favorite. Mendelssohn's work is banned in Germany. They pretend he's not one of theirs."

I wondered what the pilot would think of me, neither black nor Jewish, but a Traveller. What would he think of my people, who moved from place to place selling horses and willow baskets, collecting old clothes and mending pans, working in the tattie fields and at the berrying? Most *British* people don't like us. Surely the Nazis are worse.

I cringed into my uniform, as if it were a costume that didn't fit.

The outrageous Jerry asked another casual question.

"He wants to know," said Jane to Louisa, "if you are familiar with the music called calypso."

The lass nodded. She threw back her shoulders and stood straighter. "But it's from Trinidad. I'm from Jamaica."

The Jerry pilot breathed a long, raggedy breath. Then he held a hand toward Louisa. She flinched at first, but at last she reached to shake his offered hand. He looked her straight in the eye, solemn and serious, and repeated, "Calypso."

"I'm Louisa," she said.

Nan Campbell spoke up, wiping her hands on her pinny. "He can have Room Number Four, the best double room, at the single-room rate. Ask him how he means to pay."

Jane asked him.

His eyes flicked up to 648 Squadron's wishing coins studding

the beam above the bar. But he put his hand inside the breast of his leather coat and pulled out a wodge of limp English pound notes in a silver clip.

"I'll show him upstairs," said Nan. "Ellen, perhaps you'll come along so I don't have to go alone."

The Jerry picked up his wooden box. He asked Jane another question.

"What did he say?" said Nan.

"He wants to take my gramophone to his room."

"*You let him,*" said Nan, shaking a finger at her old auntie to make her mind. "I've given him a bed, and I've given you another whisky, and Ellen has to drive him about. You let him choose some records."

Everybody paraded up the pitchy stairs together as if we were about to have a party. Louisa carted the gramophone, and I brought the record albums and the torch. Jane, who couldn't do stairs quickly, jiggled about trying to catch hold of things, finally anxious about something—her precious music. Louisa jiggled about trying to catch hold of Jane. Mrs. Campbell jiggled about anxiously as well, but she was worried about something else. She needed Jane to translate as she showed the Jerry how to work the gas fire in his bedroom.

He did not at all seem to understand about putting the money in the meter. In any case he hadn't any small change. He turned the gas tap on and off about five times, which frightened me all over again, wondering if he might forget it was on and fill the house with gas.

He was only going to be here for one night, God pity us—couldn't Nan Campbell just turn the fire on herself this one time without having to teach him all the fine points of the meter?

Louisa finally ran back to Room Number Five and donated a shilling of her own, which was a very dear donation. But it got the fire going without a gas leak, and it meant we could all go to bed.

As Louisa dropped her shilling into the meter like a wishing coin itself, I wished that the enemy airman staying under our roof would not shoot any of us before he left.

Louisa:

Felix Baer looked exhausted, but he didn't go to sleep right away. I know, because I heard him playing records for half the night.

Beside me in Room Five's mysteriously lumpy bed with its musty mattress—you could smell damp in it through the clean bedclothes—Jane was asleep, I think, the moment her head hit the pillow. Not me. It was the second-longest day of my life, after the day when the bomb dropped in Balham and Mummy was killed. I dozed off, in the unfamiliar bed next to this unfamiliar old woman, but I kept waking and hearing the music in Room Four. Record after record. I'd fall asleep listening to Mozart, and wake up and hear Ravel. Or Cole Porter. Or some German song I didn't recognize.

Felix Baer couldn't have slept at all, because he kept changing records and winding the gramophone. Perhaps he was keeping himself awake on purpose, waiting for his contact from Intelligence.

The music was only a lullaby lilt through the closed doors and the passage between us, but it must have been jolly loud in the room where he was playing it. By and by I noticed that most of what he played—most of Jane's records, actually—were all forbidden in Germany now.

So he was treating himself to a feast of beautiful music from before the war, from before the Nazis, when people could listen to whatever they liked.

I wanted to hate him. But the music made my heart sore, and I remembered the warm touch of his palm against mine, and his bony fingers flying over the piano keys. What was it like to be a musician and not be able to play music you love? I thought of my flute and all it meant to me, lessons with Mummy, duets with Daddy, sitting on the roof of the flat in London trying to imitate the starlings at dusk when I should have been practicing.

I drifted off once more, and this time when I woke I heard nothing but the wind in the Scotch pines on the knoll above the Limehouse, and Jane gently snoring beside me. Felix Baer was

finished playing records.

I knew there wasn't a thing Jane could do if that German decided to shoot us in our sleep. But I didn't think he would, not after she let him share her music. Lying next to her, I felt like I was in the safest place in the house.

So finally I went to sleep properly.

Hours before it grew light, I opened my eyes and stared into a wholly unknown dark. I had absolutely no idea where I was. On a train? Or a boat? In an air-raid shelter? England, Jamaica, the Isle of Man? I wasn't scared—I just had no idea where I was. I'd been going so hard for so long that I'd lost my place in the world.

But I knew the sleeping person beside me was not Mummy but Johanna von Arnim, otherwise known as Jane Warner. This reminded me I'd come to Scotland to look after her, and I was in the Limehouse, and down the passage was a music-loving German pilot.

My stomach lurched with fear and fascination. It was hopeless trying to go back to sleep. I lay stiffly.

Before long there came a tapping at the door, soft but insistent. Jane slept on as if she were completely deaf. What if I opened the door and it was Felix Baer, with his pianist's hands and tired eyes? What would I say? We didn't share any language but music.

I found myself whistling the opening bars of the *Hebrides Overture* under my breath.

"Louisa!" The voice was high-pitched and urgent and definitely didn't belong to the German pilot. "*Louisa*, wake up!"

I crawled out of bed and clunked around in the dark, feeling my way. Jane and I had locked ourselves in; I'd shoved a chair under the door handle to brace it. It took me a moment to undo all this extra security.

"*Louisa!*"

"I'm coming!"

I got the door open. Ellen McEwen stood in the shadowy passage in her ATS uniform, less crisp than it was the day before, holding an electric torch.

"I have to take the pilot back to RAF Windyedge," she said. "His contact isn't here, but he wants to go. You can tell he's a mess of nerves. Will you come with me? Please come with me."

"Oh—" I protested. "But I'm supposed to help Jane—it's her

first day here!”

“I asked Mrs. Campbell, and she’ll take over till you’re back. Please, *please*, Louisa.”

Didn’t I want to do something to win the war? To be in the sky? To fly into combat against German pilots?

Well, here was a German pilot.

It wasn’t flying into combat, but it mattered. I could go with Ellen, and do a little thing for our side.

And I wanted to see him again.

“Yes, all right.” It came out like the croak of a tree frog. I cleared my throat and tried again. “Let me get dressed.”

“Thank you, *thank you*. He’s downstairs having coffee. We can have some too.”

Mrs. Campbell had also made a great pot of porridge. We all stood at the bar strengthening ourselves, Ellen and I at one end and Felix Baer at the other. The “coffee” was made from chicory syrup, and it was terrible. I decided I would not drink coffee again until rationing ended or I went back to Jamaica, whichever came first. But that pilot-pianist drank it greedily.

When he’d finished he looked up at the sixpences and shillings left behind by 648 Squadron, gleaming silver in the yellow light of the lamp Mrs. Campbell had switched on behind the bar.

He reached into a pocket and pulled out something that shone like a silver sixpence. I couldn’t tell what kind of coin it was between his thumb and forefinger. It wouldn’t have fit in the gas meter, but he reached up and pressed it firmly into a crack in the black oak beam over our heads.

“You see, Louisa?”

I jumped. I didn’t expect him to call me by name.

“How you say—?” He faltered. “For luck.”

“Aye, right,” said Mrs. Campbell darkly. “Good luck, then.”

He pushed away his coffee cup and went through to the hall. His boots clattered as he took the stairs two at a time. I worried he’d break his neck in the unfamiliar dark. A minute later we heard him come back down.

He whisked through the vestibule with his wooden box, and there was a lot of slamming of doors as he loaded his things in the Tilly. He ran up to Room Number Four again, and this time came down carrying Jane’s gramophone in one arm and the armful of records in the other. He set these politely on the piano and the shelf

in the cupboard beside it.

“*Danke*—thank you,” Felix Baer told us, smiling. He pointed upstairs, mimed sleep, and said, “Thank you, ladies.”

“Aye, right,” Nancy Campbell repeated bitterly.

“Come,” he commanded Ellen.

She flinched. Her pale face was fish-belly white again, as if she expected her head to be chopped off.

Now was my chance to help her.

I swallowed hard, linked my elbow with Ellen’s, and said to the airman, “I’m coming too.”

Ellen squeezed my arm and turned her head to give me the faintest hint of a grateful smile. We stood side by side as if we were the best of friends determined to do a job together, not two strangers who’d only just met for a few minutes the day before.

The German pilot seemed perplexed. Then he figured out what I meant. He shrugged and jerked his head toward the door, beckoning us both. “Come, two girls. It is good.”

He was going to let me go along without a fight.

I stepped away from Ellen so I could pull on my mother’s winter coat.

Then we followed the German pilot into the windy dark.

Ellen:

Gripping that black pistol, the Jerry pilot chivied Louisa into the Tilly ahead of him.

“You all right?” she whispered as I climbed in on my side.

“Aye, no bother,” I muttered. “Better not chat.”

She sat squashed between me in my woolen overcoat and himself in his shiny leather one. “He thinks we’re friends,” she said. “We *should* chat. We should act like we’re not scared. He’ll tell us to stop if he minds.”

I tried to get a keek at her face as I started the engine, but it was too dark. She seemed a quiet thing. But she was bolder than she looked, and clever with it.

The Jerry pilot kept his pistol pointed at me, his arm across the dashboard.

“Don’t wave your hands or look as if you’re going to fight him,” Louisa said sensibly. “Just chat about the road and how long it takes to get there and things like that.”

“Well, then,” I said, and swallowed. “Um. Bit cold for the time of year, aye?”

“Is it? This is my first time in Scotland. Everyone always asks me if I’m cold! I’m used to being cold. I lived in London for three years, but I grew up in Jamaica.”

Jamaica! Was that in the East or West Indies? I didn’t like to ask. Was this how folk felt when they found I was a Traveller, so full of ignorance they couldn’t talk sense?

Of course most folk don’t ask those questions whilst driving an RAF utility vehicle, hovering from hedge to hedge because they are trying to keep an eye on the German’s gun on the dashboard and hoping it doesn’t go off by accident when they hit a bump in the lane.

The pilot didn’t tell us to hush, though, so Louisa kept going, like a terrier with a bone. “Could you drive before the war?” she asked.

“Only—only a wee bit,” I said through gritted teeth. “I trained

when I joined up.”

“Do you like it?”

Had I ever thought whether I liked it or not? It was a fair question.

“Aye,” I whispered. “I do like it. Makes me feel powerful, managing a big machine like this.”

“All that noise and speed!” she said as we rattled up to the airfield barrier.

“And the smell of petrol,” I agreed. “Sharp and fummy. Exciting.”

I stopped to wait for the guards to come out.

Louisa said fiercely, “An important job to do.”

I thought she sounded envious.

Sergeants Nobby Fergusson and Jack Hinton came up to the van, and Jack pointed his rifle at us.

Louisa:

It was still dark. Ellen cranked down her window to talk to the guards.

“All right, there, Volunteer McEwen?” one of them asked anxiously. He poked an electric torch through the window and swept it over us.

“I am still alive,” Ellen answered bitterly. “The Jerry’s heading home now. Get your light away, Nobby, you’re blinding me.”

“Who’s the colored girl?”

I tightened my hands on the dashboard. Why didn’t he ask *me* that question?

The light moved, and Ellen answered. “She’s called Louisa Adair. She’s new at the Limehouse. I asked her to come along with me.”

“Has she got ID?”

“Nobby Fergusson, I will give you ID at the end of my arm with my fist in your teeth. Or will you take over my job?” Ellen snarled. “Because I have got a ruddy Jerry’s gun pointed at my face today, as you can see—”

The torch’s beam fell still, lighting up Felix Baer’s hand on the dashboard holding the pistol. The curves of shining black metal gleamed softly in the dark.

Suddenly the barrel of the other guard's rifle cut the light as he pushed it through the window past Ellen's head, pointing it at Felix Baer. The end of the long gun was in front of my nose.

In a flash, as I flung up my hands to protect my face, a lot of terrifying things happened. Ellen cried, "You idiot, Jack, away wi' you!" Felix Baer pulled me against his chest, which meant that if the rifle went off in that closed space in the dark, I'd be the first to die. Baer raised his pistol, reached across Ellen, and with a sharp crack, fired a shot out her window that must have missed the guard's head by a quarter of an inch.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot at him!" Ellen screeched. *"You cannae see! You're too close, you'll hit us!"*

She grabbed the rifle. She couldn't push it away, but she stopped the guard from aiming it. Felix Baer had his arm across my shoulders, not choking me, but gripping me firm against him.

"Shh, shh," he said softly in my ear. *"Louisa. Stille."*

I held still, cold against his stiff leather coat.

"Lift the barrier, will you, Nobby?" Ellen gasped. "So we can get him to his plane and get rid of him."

"We fly now," agreed Felix Baer with authority. He urged Ellen to start forward. "This girl. We fly."

The defeated guards raised the barrier.

Ellen:

My hands on the steering wheel and the gear stick quaked like birch leaves in a wind. I couldn't drive in such a state.

I whispered, "Crack on with your chat, will you, Louisa?"

She looked up over her shoulder at the Jerry pilot. "I need to help her," she said. "Is that all right?"

He let go of her throat, but not the pistol.

Louisa pressed cold hands over mine and squeezed. "He won't hurt us. He won't. I think it would kill him. It's all for show. We've only to get him to his plane, and he'll go back to wherever he came from—"

"He said I have to go along," I whispered. "*This girl. We fly.*"

"He might have meant me," Louisa said. "But I think he meant only to the airfield, not—not to *Germany*."

She rabbited on hopefully, and I realized her accent wasn't just London—it was actually quite posh, too. Not proper posh, not like Jamie Stuart when he was putting it on, but like someone who reads a lot—like someone whose mum was a schoolteacher. Her calm voice worked on me like a granny coaxing a sobbing bairn with promises. At last I took a deep breath and shook off her hands. Die here, or fly to Germany? We had to move, at any rate.

I put the Hillman Minx in gear. It stalled as I moved forward. I took another breath and started the motor again carefully. I didn't dare steal another keek at Nobby and his mate as we left them.

My passengers were quiet as we sped along the narrow drive. I wondered what the Jerry pilot was thinking about. What would happen at the airfield when he tried to get me, or Louisa, into his plane? Would the RAF Windyedge lads let him take off? What would happen to me, or to Louisa, if they didn't?

God pity us.

Louisa:

It wasn't as dark now. Felix Baer would have daylight to fly in.

I was crammed between him and Ellen and couldn't possibly try to escape until one of them got out. I squinted into the gloom over the gun on the dashboard, trying to ignore it, and stared out at the aerodrome.

I am on a Royal Air Force aerodrome.

I thought I'd suffocate with fear and excitement. It was like having my own private Blitz in my head and my stomach.

I saw a cluster of sheds and barracks, concrete and boards and weathered brick. The drive was rutted gravel and the runway was grass. It all looked the same color in the gray dawn. There was one plane parked on the grass.

It was the German pilot's Luftwaffe fighter, like some giant stinging insect with broad blades for wings. Its markings were covered, but it was as sleek and dangerous as a sword, a battle weapon and armor rolled into one.

I thought of Ellen saying that driving made her feel powerful. What must it be like to *fly*?

It may have been nerves or petrol fumes going to my head, but for a moment I envied Felix Baer even more than I envied Ellen McEwen.

Ellen:

I pulled up by operations. But the Jerry wouldn't walk across the airfield with folk such as Nobby and Jack chasing him. "Go, go." He pointed angrily to his plane, on the grass outside the hangar, and rapped his pistol against the windscreen for emphasis.

I didn't ken how many shots he had in that pistol, and I didn't want to find out. Never have I felt so sick with fear.

I drove as slowly as I dared, bumping over clats of turf, trying to give our lads a chance to come after us without giving the Jerry another fright.

I stopped alongside the plane and opened my door and climbed out. So did he. He wasn't going to give us any chance to make a run for it.

Louisa:

I jumped out after both of them. In the gloom, I could see the shadows of men running, and it looked like every one of them held a rifle. It was like watching a cinema newsreel, all black and gray, soldiers rushing into battle.

Weren't we supposed to let the German pilot go? Didn't he have a code name in some secret Intelligence plan? The guards at the gate nearly killed us trying to take command of him. But there wasn't supposed to be a battle.

I shouted, "Don't shoot! Don't shoot!"

A few of the men skipped to a stop, as if the film reel wasn't spooling properly.

"Is that Volunteer McEwen? Who's with you?"

None of them knew who I was.

"The lassie works for Mrs. Campbell at the pub," Ellen cried. "God pity us, never mind just now—don't fright the Jerry! Keep your guns down unless he tries to take us along!"

If they threatened him, he might panic and use his pistol again. I didn't believe he'd hurt me or Ellen, but we weren't armed men. Maybe he wouldn't aim to miss this time.

Ellen:

He herded us like a pair of ewe lambs, pointing our way with his gun. He stood us on the other side of his Messerschmitt, where no one could keek any part of us but our feet beneath the carcass of the plane. Our heads were right next to where the machine guns stuck out of the wing.

"What's he doing?" Louisa whispered. She only came up to my shoulder, and we both craned to spy on him.

"Sorting his gear," I guessed. The nose of the plane pointed over my head and I couldn't see anything, either.

She hooked her elbow through mine again.

"If we both fight him..." that brave lass whispered. But she didn't finish her idea. He was out of our sight just now, but he still had that gun.

We heard the Jerry slam the doors of the Tilly. Then he got up

on the wing we couldn't see, and pulled back the cockpit canopy. He took out a parachute and life jacket and chucked them on the ground.

"What's he doing now?" Louisa asked.

"Making room for his precious box," I said.

Louisa:

I glimpsed the top of one narrow seat in the cockpit, with nothing behind it, and only the controls in front. He must have had to fly with the wooden case in his lap. Even his long coat must have been awkward in that cramped space. He couldn't possibly have room to take a hostage, could he?

If he did, I would be a better fit than tall, long-legged Ellen.

Could he? Cram me in between his shoulder and the metal hull, and take off into the rising sun on those knife-blade wings?

For one thousandth of a second, just before it plummeted in fear, my heart *flew*.

Ellen:

He stood on the wing opposite. His left arm was straight out with the gun once again aimed at my head.

I spat to tell him how much I hated him.

He heaved a sigh. He kept his arm out with that ugly pistol cocked, and turned to shout toward the lads lined up on the edge of the airfield, pointing at him with their rifles.

"Starter!"

Louisa, braver than me, ducked to keek underneath the Messerschmitt and see what was going on.

Louisa:

The pilot was ready to leave. I couldn't take my eyes off him. Being

interested numbed my fear, like ice numbing a twisted ankle, the way reading numbed grief.

He untied the fabric covering the plane's Luftwaffe markings so he wouldn't look suspicious when he landed back in Norway or wherever he was going. He checked the engine and wheels, he checked the hinges on the wings and tail, and he checked the propeller. I longed to know what he was looking for, where the fuel went, what the hinges on the wings did.

At last he strapped on his life jacket and parachute and pulled on a leather flying helmet.

He yelled again in English to the soldiers with the guns, repeating what he'd said before.

"Starter!"

He waved a crankshaft at them, just like you'd use to start an old car, and mimed winding it.

Ellen:

"He needs a mechanic to turn over the engine," I told Louisa in a whisper. "Perhaps when the other lad comes near we'll be able to run...."

"But he'll need both hands to drive the plane," Louisa whispered back. "Like you do in the van, I'm sure of it. Wait till the engine starts. And *then* we'll run."

The Jerry had to wait along with us for the starter. He climbed in and sat there with his left arm slung out of the cockpit and his filthy old pistol *still* pointing at my head.

At least neither one of us was in the plane with him. A bonny green sprig of hope unfolded in my heart.

Louisa:

The mechanic stood on the other side of the plane to crank the engine, so we couldn't see what he was doing. But we jolly well heard and felt when it started. The roar exploded around us like a tube train pulling into an Underground station. The German pilot

pulled his arm back into the cockpit as the plane jumped forward an inch or two; the wing nearly knocked us over.

Before he slid the canopy shut over his head, Felix Baer leaned out and waved at us.

The gun was gone. I was right—he needed both hands for the plane. We were in his way now, and he was trying to shoo us off like chickens.

I waved back, to let him know I understood.

Ellen:

“Go!” Louisa cried.

She grabbed my arm and harled me along beside her. We raced away across the mowed strip of runway with the noise of the Messerschmitt howling around us. Then we were stumbling over longer, slippery grass. The Luftwaffe engine screamed like a pack of devils, and if anyone was shooting at anyone, I couldn’t hear it.

All at once that strange lassie stopped running.

She turned about to watch him go.

Louisa:

The sky was dark blue and gray with clouds, but it was light enough that the sun must have been up somewhere, somewhere not so gloomy as northern Scotland in November. The German plane lifted off the runway into the east wind.

Felix Baer was black wings against the gray sky, and then he was a black dot over the North Sea, and then he was gone.

Jamie:

Overnight, Shetland came under a bombardment of howling wind and pouring rain, battering down from the northeast, and nobody could take off. A-Flight was in bed, exhausted after slogging through the storm, but B-Flight sat in the officers' lounge consuming shortbread and watery tea when Cromwell came in and barked, "Pack up, you lot: 648 Squadron's posted to the mainland. A-Flight's joining the Spitfires at RAF Deeside, and B-Flight's going to fly from RAF Windyedge for the rest of the winter. The Spits have their own commanding officer, so I'll be at Windyedge with B-Flight, but as there's only ten miles between bases I'll keep tabs on all of 648 Squadron."

This was the best news I'd had in a long time. Cromwell was going to have to commute, and I'd be back at RAF Windyedge, where my friend Ellen McEwen was the ATS driver. And it was less than an hour on the train to get home if I ever had a day's leave.

"What'll we be doing there?" asked Pilot Officer Adam Stedman hopefully. He was the new leader of Madeira Section, the other half of B-Flight—the fellow Cromwell had threatened to replace me with. "Hunting U-boats?"

Up in Shetland, our assignment was to bomb German shipping. The anti-aircraft guns on their destroyers were our worst enemy. We longed to have a go at their submarines, which would be less able to fire back at us, but we never knew where to find them.

"You'll be on warship escort and reconnaissance. And protecting coastal fishing and supply fleets. RAF Windyedge needs a squadron stationed there until a spot of bother with Intelligence blows over. Get ready to leave."

Cromwell stormed out again, slamming the door behind him, to go wake up A-Flight and rattle them with his urgent news to start packing. But none of B-Flight jumped up to get moving.

"Bloody North Sea mist," somebody muttered. "We're not flying anywhere in weather like this, are we?"

Silver nudged me with his elbow. He lit a cigarette and

murmured, "Sounds like they're sending us somewhere a bit less hot. I think the lads need rallying."

I wondered if the move was punishment for Dougie and his crew not keeping their mouths shut, or for Ignacy's overconfidence, or for my struggle to get B-Flight's new aircrews to work together.

Then I remembered the radio operator with his urgent message from Windyedge.

"Maybe it's hotter than Cromwell's letting on," I said. "Maybe the spot of bother with Intelligence and that Jerry we ran into were part of the same op. Maybe they're sending us as a guard force."

"You sound very clued up."

I stubbed out my own cigarette. "Something's going on," I said. "We're supposed to play along without knowing what." I nodded toward Dougie Kerr, leaning his wiry ginger head forward to catch what I was muttering. "Careless talk costs lives," I said. "Or perhaps Dougie's going a bit deaf from all that rear gunnery and we should invest in an ear trumpet for him."

Silver laughed. "I think a megaphone for you would be a better investment." He drew on his cigarette. "Now's your chance. Take the podium."

He was right, as usual. I stood up, grabbed a spoon, and clinked my teacup for attention.

"All right, lads!"

They looked at me like expectant puppies. They *were* like puppies—untrained, disobedient, but anxious for praise and action, and maybe, if I worked at it, I'd win their loyalty. I'd had it before, to the death. Starting over was hard on us all.

"I'll bet every one of you began the war thinking you'd be a fighter pilot in a Spitfire or a Hurricane," I said.

Every one of them nodded, grumbling in agreement. "Too bloody right!" said the new Australian pilot, Harry Morrow.

"Well, we're not flying the most glamorous kites, but we're just as important and just as dead when our luck runs out. I'm not going to quote poetry, but if you like, Flying Officer Silvermont, my navigator here, can recite John Donne's 'No man is an island'—"

Laughter and hoots of "No thank you very much!"

"What about action?" asked Dougie Kerr, the big-mouthed gingery Australian air gunner. "I want another go, and I won't blow our own tail off this time."

His pilot, tall Harry Morrow, and their navigator, baby-faced

Gavin Hamilton, shared a laugh.

I glanced over at Ignacy, Pimms Section's bloodthirsty Polish pilot.

"We all want another go," I said. "Only next time we'll coordinate the action, all right? No heroics with Messerschmitts. There's only one Blenheim pilot who's an official ace, Reginald Peacock over in 235 Squadron, and he's dead now. You can't dogfight in a Blenheim; it's not built for single combat. If we want to count as aces, we have to do it as a team. German battleships and U-boats count for us as much as fighter planes. Let's aim to get five while we're at Windyedge, and we'll all be aces."

"All right, I will drink to that," said Ignacy.

"I'm in," said Adam Stedman from Madeira Section.

The Welsh navigator, Derfel Cledwyn, held up his teacup to Ignacy. They both knocked back their tea as if they were sharing a toast with whisky or vodka. The only one who didn't crack a smile was their new gunner, Bill Yorke. But he was always a bit quiet. Tough job being thrown in with Ignacy and Derfel, who jawed away at each other in the air in Polish and Welsh as if they were playing at League of Nations.

"You'll all like being at Windyedge," I added. "It's close enough to Stonehaven and Aberdeen that you can go to the cinema or a dance hall in bad weather, and there's a jolly good village pub within walking distance—"

"I remember that pub!" Chip put in enthusiastically. "With the wishing coins and the piano. Nancy Campbell always had the fire burning for us. That'll be fine."

"Something to look forward to," I agreed, deciding not to tell him off for interrupting since I wasn't being formal anyway. "We'll polish up formation flying on our way to Windyedge. And I'll keep my ear to the ground so we don't get in trouble with Old Cromwell again."

I looked around the room at these few friends and strangers. And Silver, my best friend, always watching my back. Pimms and Madeira, B-Flight's lads. My lads.

I raised my own teacup. "To Windyedge!"

"To Windyedge!"

The applause was polite rather than thundering, but at least they applauded.

"Nice speech, Scotty," said Silver, grinning at me. "That's got

everybody ready for a fight. I look forward to us all being official aces.”

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Part 2

STORM FRONT

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Ellen:

That Intelligence toff, Robert Ethan, turned up at the Limehouse late that morning for about three hours. He was rail-thin and dressed in dapper tweeds, with huge eyes behind specs thick as bottle glass. His magnified eyes made you feel like a midgie pinned against a piece of card when he looked at you.

Nan fixed up her best double room for him—Number Four, the same one she'd let to the Jerry pilot—but Ethan didn't stay. He was in a hurry and hopping mad that he'd missed the ado. He'd spent most of the day before stuck on a train waiting for a troops transport to pass. When he got off at last—with special permission to climb down onto the railway track and walk away before the train moved!—he legged it to an RAF aerodrome and tried to fly to Windyedge to make up the lost time. But the weather down south closed in on them, so then he ended up stuck somewhere else in England overnight. Now another storm was rolling in, and he didn't want to waste his precious time being stuck here.

He hung about long enough to grill us all, and then he poked around in the Jerry pilot's room, like a terrier sniffing out rats. After his wee nosy he came downstairs and went straight to the gramophone case and tested its working parts. Finally he pawed through Jane's records, emptying all the album sleeves and checking with Louisa about which ones the Jerry had played. He didn't say what he was looking for, and as far as I could tell, he didn't find anything.

Last thing before he went, he turned his sticking-pin gaze on Louisa, standing quiet as a mouse at Jane's shoulder by the big old mantelpiece.

"That is quite the collection of wishing coins," he said. "Aren't airmen a superstitious lot! Well, perhaps the hoodoo will help you to feel at home, Louisa. Thank you, my dear Mrs. Campbell, for being so patient while I shifted the furniture about upstairs. And you, Mrs. Warner, for allowing me to disturb your recordings. You have a very youthful taste in music! I apologize if I haven't put

everything back in its proper place—mustn't leave any stone unturned. I shall dash now before the weather closes in. I am damnably disappointed. Volunteer McEwen, is your utility vehicle at my service?"

As if I had a choice. At least he wouldn't pull a gun.

It wasn't until later, back at the Limehouse, that I realized how unpopular he'd made himself.

"All right, Louisa?" I asked her. She was rinsing crockery behind the bar, her pretty heart-shaped face pinched and frowning. I added, "Where is everybody?"

"Mrs. Campbell is putting things right in Room Four, and Jane is supposed to be having a rest. She spent *ages* fussing over her records, and she made me go with her to the village shop to try to find sticky tape for a torn album sleeve. Now her bad hip is hurting. She won't *say*, but I'm learning to guess."

"Does it make you cross?"

Her frowning brows went smooth. "I'm not cross."

I said gently, "But I can see that you are."

She pressed her lips together and shook her head.

We'd only met the day before, but we'd shared a great trial that morning, and it made us closer than we would be otherwise. I knew she wasn't happy. "Was it something Nan said? Don't let her fash you," I told her. "She's not too old to change her ways, but she's slow to learn."

I lived in fear Nan would twig what I was and we'd have a bitter fight over whether I should leave her house. I didn't think she'd prefer me to raise a tent in her garden, but I wasn't ready to find out.

"If she said something rude, it was ignorance," I said. "She's crabbit, but she doesn't mean to be hurtful."

"Oh!" Louisa gasped, and I saw I'd hit close to truth. "It wasn't Nan. It was that awful Intelligence officer going on about hoodoo! *Why?* Do I *look* like a fool-fool country gal? Is that because I'm only fifteen? Or because I've left school without finishing? Because I'm not doing a skilled job? *Or is it just because I'm from Jamaica?*"

She rattled the cups like a rebel. "My mum taught music in an English school. She played the harp at weddings, and the church organ for two different congregations. I hardly know what he *meant*, and anyway it's Mrs. Campbell who's superstitious, not me!" She waved at the coins over her head. "Have you heard her going

on about these? ‘That’s dead men’s money. Leave it.’ She knows the name of every airman every penny belonged to. She talks as if they’re her own children!”

“I’ll wager she didn’t like that filthy Jerry leaving his wish up there with the rest,” I said. “Let’s take his penny out and see if she misses it.”

Louisa raised her eyes to the wooden beam.

She might not be superstitious, but she knew exactly which one of those silver wishes belonged to that Jerry pilot.

I saw where she was looking, and reached up to pick it between my fingernails. It had a raised rim and came out easily when I pulled on it.

I held it on my open palm so Louisa could see, and we stared.

It was no coin.

“That’s a typewriter key,” said Louisa.

It was a wee black enamel disc, just big enough to set your fingertip on, with a shiny, smooth nickel edge. The edge made a sort of lip around the key, like a pot lid. The letter on it was an *L*: *L* for *Louisa*.

And aye, yes, I am sure he chose it on purpose.

Louisa blinked up at the ceiling again, and I remembered Nan in the room above. We stood quiet as mice, listening, but she didn’t come down.

“It’s off that thing in the box,” Louisa whispered. “It was a sort of electrical typewriter. I saw inside it when he put it on the piano and the front fell open. The keys were just like that.”

I rolled the disk between my fingers. I wondered why he’d left it.

Louisa held out her hand, and I could see she wanted it for herself.

I dropped it into her palm. She closed her fingers like a gamekeeper’s iron trap snapping shut, and caught me frowning.

She said, “He played so beautifully.”

“You weren’t at all afraid,” I said, remembering how sick I’d felt. “You came along brave as a king going into battle.”

“No, I was terribly afraid,” she contradicted. “But I wanted to help you! I want so much to do something useful. I didn’t believe he’d hurt us—he hated bullying us. He did it because he had to. Like airmen dropping bombs.”

“I worried he’d take one of us with him,” I admitted.

“So did I, until I saw how tight a fit it would be!”

We shared a shaky laugh. It felt good to have it behind us.

“We won!” I said. “Our first battle together! Keep that wee charm for luck.”

“What did I say about superstition?” Louisa exclaimed, and I laughed again.

“Och, then keep it as a trophy! Don’t let Nan spy you, though.”

“I won’t,” Louisa said.

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Louisa:

Mrs. Campbell flounced downstairs, carrying a heather broom in one hand and a feather duster in the other. Her wispy hair coiled in sweaty frills around her face. She looked like she'd just finished one battle and was ready for the next.

Though she didn't see what we'd been up to, my cheeks heated up. I slipped Felix Baer's typewriter key into my skirt pocket. Tea, I was supposed to be making tea for Jane. I'd lit the burner for the kettle ages ago, and it still hadn't boiled.

"The flame needs to be higher," Mrs. Campbell said, turning it up. "Goodness, Louisa, you were in London three years already, did no one teach you how to make tea? Leaving the gas low just wastes it!"

"Don't have a go at her for not knowing her way about your kitchen, Mrs. C.," said Ellen, straightening her cap in a way that told you she was enlisted. "She's not been here a day, and we've all had a fright."

Mrs. Campbell harrumphed and made the tea herself. She loaded a tray for me to carry up to Jane.

Then it came out why she was cross about the wasted gas. She was just blaming it on me because the real culprit had already left.

"That Robert Ethan left the fire on in Room Four, despite all I said to him, and it's been roaring away all day with no one in there," she grumbled as she poured boiling water. "And he got the last of the milk as well; there isn't any more till tomorrow. Aunt Jane'll have to have her tea black."

Nan gave me the tray and turned around to check she'd turned off the burner. Then she lifted the wooden gate for me to get out from behind the bar.

"When you go upstairs, Louisa, would you run into Room Four and close the window? It was much too warm in there by the time I'd swept and put everything back." She added, I think to herself, "I must get the collection man to check that gas-fire fitting when he fetches the money from the meters. It has come loose. That can't be

safe, and it's my best room."

Away I went upstairs feeling assaulted by frustration. I was angry at Nancy Campbell, who was paying me but who was clearly going to be difficult to get along with—and I was angry at myself, too, for not standing up to her. I didn't understand why I was so moved by the strange German pilot I should by rights have hated, and why I so disliked the British officer who was supposed to be on my side.

It was after three o'clock. In another hour, this far north, it would start to get dark. I lit the fire in our room and left Jane with the tea tray while I went to close the window in the room down the passage.

Number Four wasn't like ours at all—I could see why Nan said it was her best. It faced southeast, like ours, but had a big Victorian bay window. The room was tidy but freezing, because the middle sash was open wide, and wind made the curtains float and stir like ghosts. I had to hang my weight on the window frame, giving a jump that got my feet off the ground, before I could shift it to close it.

I stood looking out for a moment at the beautiful, bleak brown-and-gray view of the moor and village rooftops and North Sea. It wasn't raining, but the wind made the Scotch pines bow on the ridge above the old house. Somewhere in the far sky a storm was blowing over, bad weather rushing west from Norway, across Scotland, out to the Atlantic.

My mind followed the wind west to the blue Caribbean Sea and back five years to Mummy's thirty-fifth birthday. Daddy borrowed a rowboat and took all three of us across the water from Port Royal for a picnic on the coral beach at Lime Cay, and a storm rolled in late in the afternoon when we were on our way back. Daddy rowed for ages and couldn't get any closer to the mainland, so he and Mummy each took an oar. I was at their feet, bundled in the picnic blanket. We were all soaked to the skin, and I had to bang the aluminum coffee pot with a spoon and sing "Land of Hope and Glory" to set the rhythm for their rowing.

It should have been terrifying—thinking about it, I saw that it might really have been terrifying, especially for Mummy. But for me, it was wonderful, a big adventure, helping them to fight our way home together.

So proud of my girl, Daddy had said. *A real voyager, not a bit*

scared.

I turned back to the cold room. I stood there for a moment—not long, only two or three seconds—and thought about Felix Baer playing records in here for half the night. What was in his mind all that time? Was he a professional musician, like my mother, before the war? What was his family like? Did he have a sweetheart? What would happen to him if the Luftwaffe found out he'd sneaked off to Windyedge when he was supposed to be shooting down British planes?

And why had he pulled a key off his typewriter, an *L* for *Louisa*, and stuck it in the ceiling of the Limehouse?

I shook my head to clear it. Then, just before I went back to Jane, I checked to make sure the gas tap was off. The gas fires in Mrs. Campbell's rooms were just like the one Mummy and I had in our London flat, and Mummy had dinned it into my head to make sure the gas was always off when I left the room.

Mrs. Campbell was right—one of the Victorian panels around the new fire was loose. I rattled the fixture under my hand, worrying. What if the pipes came disconnected? Town gas was deadly when it leaked. I looked more closely, and saw there were fresh dents on both the new fire and the old frame, as if someone had forced a wedge between them and tried to pry the fire out of its setting.

I stared at the gas fire, small and neat, not as secure as it should have been. In the old fireplace behind the Victorian panels, there would be a dark, hollow space where you could hide *anything*. Secret plans. Vials of poison. A *bomb*, perhaps.

Surely Felix Baer would have made noise getting the panels off.

But no one would have heard anything over the music.

I picked at that shaky cast iron panel with my fingernails. I couldn't get enough grip on it to pry it loose.

I ran back to Room Five. Jane sat calmly drinking tea. She looked at me in surprise; I was fizzing with excitement.

"What in the world, Louisa?"

"I'll be back in a moment, just a moment," I panted. "I need—"

I opened my flute case and grabbed the thin steel rod for cleaning the flute.

"What's Nancy want with you now, girl?" Jane inquired. "You're not to run her errands; you're here for me. You mustn't let her order you about. I'll have a word if you like."

"It's not her. It might not be anything. I'll tell you in a minute. Wish me luck!"

"What in the world?" she said again, and laughed. Now she was curious. She saluted me with her teacup. "Off you go and hurry up! Good luck!"

I was not sure what I'd do if Nancy Campbell discovered me taking her fireplace apart, the day after I arrived in her house. What was the worst that could happen—might she fire me with no pay? I knew how desperate she was for someone to look after Jane. I could talk my way out of this.

I went back to Room Four, wedged the steel rod into the fireplace, and pulled. The panel came off easily, falling into the tiled hearth with a crash. I caught my breath, but no one seemed to hear.

I peered inside the hole I'd made in the wall of the Limehouse.

In the back of the fireplace was an old deep-set stone hearth that went right into the full thickness of the wall. The gas line came up through a pipe in the floor and ran behind the grate to connect to the new fire. It wasn't at all disturbed by the panel being out. In the dark, sitting in the two-hundred-and-fifty-year-old hearth, was Felix Baer's wooden case.

At first I was confused. I was sure I'd seen him carry it out of the house and put it in Ellen's van yesterday morning. How could it be here behind the fireplace in Room Four?

I tried to remember what I'd seen, and realized I'd seen *nothing*. He'd used the gramophone as a decoy, and by some wizardly sleight of hand he made us think he'd put his own case in the Tilly ready to fly back to Norway with him. It was dark, and nobody checked in the back of the van to see if he'd put anything there or not, and he'd made sure Ellen and I were standing on the side of the plane where we couldn't see him unloading before he took off again.

So clever. And so desperate! What exactly was this thing he'd taken such risks to deliver and leave here?

There was a small cardboard box in front of the case, not much bigger than my fist. I reached in and grabbed the box and the case, and then fit the iron panel back in place as fast as I could. It was easy to take apart and put back together, because Felix Baer had done the hard work of prying the panel loose in the first place. He must have broken it free of its fixture.

I closed up Room Four behind me and went back to Jane with

Felix Baer's wooden box.

The old woman's pale blue eyes flew wide when she saw what I was carrying. She didn't tell me off.

"I suppose you'd better lock the door," she said.

I don't think Nancy Campbell would have ever allowed us near each other if she'd guessed what collaborators we'd become.

Jane rubbed her hands together. I sat the wooden case and cardboard box on the bed and, remembering Felix Baer and his records, turned on the wireless. It took half a minute to warm up. It felt like the longest thirty seconds of my life, longer than waiting for bombs to explode during the Blitz.

But at last we were in the middle of a lovely swing tune, and I turned up the radio—not too much, as I didn't want to arouse suspicion, and our operation ought to be a quiet one. I opened the case.

I had thought it was some kind of typewriter when I caught my glimpse of it on the piano. But it wasn't. There was no place to fit paper. Instead, above the keyboard was a plate of letters that exactly matched the keyboard itself. Above the letter plate were three dials and a switch.

Jane was out of her chair, hanging on to the headboard of the bed so she could get closer. The front flap of the box came unlatched and fell open as she sat. We both saw the brand name printed on the inside: ENIGMA.

Jane bent to read the metal card, all in German, that was screwed into the inside of the top lid.

"It says it is a cipher machine," she breathed. "It must be for creating code. Or translating code."

"Are those *instructions*?" I gasped.

"Not *useful* instructions," Jane answered. "Just cleaning instructions! But it tells a bit about the moving parts...."

She kept reading, and I bent alongside her to get a closer look at the machine.

The last keypad in the bottom right corner of the keyboard was missing.

I took the *L* key out of my pocket and tried to place it over the empty peg. It didn't fit, but as I pressed the peg down, a *Q* suddenly lit up in the letter plate above the keyboard.

"It's battery-powered," Jane said. She straightened up and tapped at other keys. Random letters lit in the display plate. Each

time they lit, one of the dials moved along a notch. "It's in perfect working order."

"The letters don't match!" I exclaimed.

"It mixes them," she said. "Then they're in code. The lid says to refer to instructions we don't have."

"Maybe we can figure it out," I said.

Jane opened the cardboard box. Inside it, wrapped in a flannel cloth, were two notched steel gears each about the size of a tin of shoe polish.

"I think these are extra dials," Jane said. "You turn the dials to change the way you scramble the letters. If you put different dials in, you get even more ways to mix them up. This will keep us busy!"

I saw that you could set up the machine to turn your message into nonsense, and then someone with the same machine, or one like it, could decode your nonsense by using the same setting.

A German coding machine was sitting on my bed. Did Robert Ethan know what Felix Baer had brought with him? He hadn't said anything about it.

But he'd definitely been looking for *something*.

I knew we'd have to tell someone, but I didn't know where to start. It must be terribly, terribly secret. We couldn't telephone anybody—the people at the exchange might hear anything we said.

"What's that you've got?" Jane asked me.

"I think it is the key that goes in the corner. The pilot must have taken it off on purpose—he left it with the wishing coins this morning. He said my name. I think he *wanted* me to find it, but I don't know why."

I showed her.

I poked the nail of my little finger into the hollow back of the key, wondering why it didn't fit over its peg. Something was jammed in there, but even my little fingernail was too big to tease it out.

"Use a hairpin," suggested Jane. So I did.

The jammed-in thing was a curled-up strip of paper. I unrolled it carefully and smoothed it out against the tea tray. It had a name written on it in pencil: *Django Reinhardt*.

We stared.

Jane turned one of the dials slowly. I looked over her shoulder and tried to do the maths in my head to work out how many

combinations you could use to set the dials. Thousands of millions. No, I must be calculating wrong. *Millions of millions* of different ways to set the code.

It would be so *easy* to do with the machine and just about impossible to *undo* without it.

“Go fetch the Django Reinhardt records,” said Jane. “Bring both albums.”

“But that Intelligence officer emptied all the record sleeves,” I reminded her.

“Get them anyway.”

Mrs. Campbell did no more than glance at me as I came racing back downstairs for an armful of Jane’s records. I felt like I’d been running up and down the dark stairs of the Limehouse carrying record albums all my life.

I got back to Room Five, breathless, and dumped the records on the bed. Jane opened the first album. “There’s a separate pocket in here for album notes,” she explained. “That’s where I used to hide my bank passbook.” She checked, found nothing, and picked up the other record.

And behind the notes in that one she found three small leaflets, each one of them made of two folded pieces of paper, a plain white sheet with a red cover. The cover was printed in German.

Jane turned the pages of one of the booklets with trembling hands. The inside of the cover was scrawled with neat, penciled text. The printed sheet in the middle was a grid of numbers and letters.

“Instructions and dial settings,” Jane whispered.

I hardly dared to breathe.

“The dials are called rotors. I was right: the key plate comes up and you can change them.” Jane studied Felix Baer’s written instructions. “Go on, try it!”

“I’ll break it!” I exclaimed.

“It’s quite robust. Let’s see how it works.”

It really was like having a wonderful new toy. Jane pored over Felix Baer’s penciled instructions and the printed charts, commenting aloud as she read, while I took the machine apart and fit it back together like a puzzle box. The mechanics of it were rather beautifully simple for such a complicated piece of machinery.

“These charts tell you the code settings for each day of the month for one group of the Luftwaffe,” Jane explained. “They

change *every day*. He's given us three months' worth, but November is nearly finished. Phew! What a production military communications must be!"

We forgot everything else. We played with the German cipher machine until long after it got dark.

"All we need now is a message to decode," I said wistfully.

The old woman laughed. "Better pack it up," she said. "Then hide it all in the back of the wardrobe, under the furs."

"But we ought to tell someone—!"

"We need the right person to tell, and the right way to tell them," Jane said. Her pale blue eyes were excited in her wrinkled face. "Maybe the radio operator at the aerodrome? You needn't say what you've found—just that you have information for the War Office. Ellen can arrange it, perhaps."

I nodded. That made sense.

I placed the *L* key over the empty peg. Now it fitted perfectly.

I hid the incredible machine under Jane's furs in the back of the wardrobe. Jane watched me open my flute case to put the cleaning rod back. She picked up her teacup, took a sip, and put it down again. It had gone stone cold hours ago.

"I would love to hear you play your flute, Louisa," she said.

Tears stabbed at my eyes, and I squeezed them shut.

A man and a woman were crooning together on the radio, just as Mummy and Daddy used to do the minute he came into the house—even in England, where we had to use the piano in our landladies' sitting room. First thing always when he got home from sea, they'd throw themselves down on the piano bench, and play and sing together.

I realized I hadn't taken my flute out of its case since Mummy's death.

"I'm rubbish," I said. "I've had to do exams, and perform in school, but really I only like to play for fun. I only play for *me*. Same with the piano. Or singing. I'll never be a professional like my mother—or you! I don't like to practice. My favorite thing is just to copy tunes I hear on the radio."

"Play what you like, then," Jane said.

Despite the sudden wallop of grief, I was still jitterbugging with excitement—playing my flute would be a good way to get rid of the nerves, I knew, before I had to face Nan Campbell again.

But I wanted to play *well* for Jane—a thing I'd never thought about much before. I didn't mind being a mediocre piano player. But I suddenly wished I was better at the flute. How wonderful if she would sing with me! I imagined a new record album: *The Ballads of Jane and Louisa...*

"Jane and Louisa"... Perfect! It was another game we sang under the Bombay mango tree at my first school in Jamaica, and with my cousins under the breadfruit and ackee trees on Granny Adair's land in St. Andrew Parish. And the first time we'd met, Jane and I had sung a singing-game tune to each other.

All right, I'd play my flute for her.

I switched off the radio. Then I screwed the pieces of my flute together, ran up and down an F-major scale, and began to play.

The easy, lilting, cheerful tune was the sound of before the war. It was so short that I played it again, adding trills. In my head, I sang the verses along with the flute, and it warmed up with me. The music reminded me again of Mummy, who was always humming whatever piece she was working on, and of Daddy, who whistled when he wasn't singing, and my heart was full of pain and love.

"What is that?" Jane asked, when I'd finished.

I swallowed the ache in my throat and sang it for her. Because it wasn't about Mummy and Daddy. It was about *us*.

*"Jane and Louisa will soon come home,
They will soon come home,
They will soon come home;
Jane and Louisa will soon come home,
Into this beautiful garden."*

She laughed softly. "This beautiful garden indeed! I wonder if anything but heather grows out there in the gloom. I suppose Scotland must be beautiful in the summer."

She hummed the tune. It was wonderful how fast she could learn a song.

"Have you brought any sheet music with you?" she asked. "We could play duets. We'll have to pass time somehow. Surely it's not going to be German spies every day."

And of course it wasn't. The next day it was 648 Squadron, B-Flight.

Jamie:

The Old Roundhead split up B-Flight for our journey to RAF Windyedge. It was hard to believe he wasn't purposefully trying to get me in trouble. Adam Stedman took Madeira Section straight there, with Phyllis as a passenger. Meanwhile I had to lead Pimms to escort a patrol of British destroyers down the coast of Scotland on our way to our new post.

"Without bombs!" I cursed as we took off. "Loaded with tinned beef and spare parts, but no bombs. Just ridiculous. Heavy for an air battle, not properly armed for a scrape with the German navy."

"Beautiful night, though," said Silver.

"Yes."

"Look around!"

The moon was waning but silvery bright, in a bottle-blue sky, shining on a tossing black sea. It was bumpy flying, a fresh wind blowing behind the storm.

"It always kind of gets me," Silver said.

"Me too." I took a breath, calming down. "Maybe there won't be a battle."

The turbulence made it hard work for Ignacy and Harry to stay on my wingtips.

"Can you not take us higher and find some smooth air?" Ignacy called over the radio. "Yorkie's just been sick. I never had a sparks get sick before."

Yorkie had been in the Royal Air Force for ten years—I couldn't believe it. I resisted poking fun.

"Give him a mint imperial," I said. "Any higher and we'll attract attention."

I didn't want to meet any Messerschmitts before we'd even found our convoy.

Next it was Harry Morrow reporting that Dougie was feeling sick too.

"It's his own fault," Harry added. "He's back there with his head down, picking up German code again."

"Yorkie hears it too," Ignacy reported.

"Oi, Tex!" Silver turned around to get Chip's attention. "Can you hear it?"

"Yep," Chip said. "It's not German, though. Just strings of letters."

"It's in code, you twit," said Silver.

"I'm copying it anyway," Chip said. "I can read and fly and copy code and not get airsick. I should get a medal!"

"All we'll get is another telling off," I warned. "Be ready to transmit when we reach the convoy."

Silver got down in the nose of the plane, peering through the Perspex panels at the sea. He was the best observer in the RAF; he could see in the dark, I swear. He spotted the patrol, ships inky black against a sea I thought couldn't be any blacker. We kept our distance while Chip radioed and signaled to them with a few flashes in Morse. Sometimes our own lads below mistook us for the Luftwaffe and tried to kill us.

But these were glad to see us. I flew low, and there were dark silhouettes waving from the decks, tiny figures, working as hard and in as much danger as we were.

As I climbed skyward again, Silver started spluttering obscenities.

"*There's a goddamn U-boat down there!*" Trust Silver to spot a submarine in the dark below the surface of the black water. "Right beneath us! Turn to port—*turn one-twenty to port and fire at him, Jamie!* He's on the cruiser—he—"

I spiraled back in a screaming and dangerous dive, sending a volley of gunfire blindly into the black nothingness of the sea.

What I saw, what we all saw, was the explosion as the torpedo from the U-boat hit the Royal Navy ship and its engines blew up. There was a fireball of orange light in the silver and black, and we were so low that the shock rocked our wings.

"Can you still see it?" I cried, leveling the Blenheim, checking my wingtips for Ignacy and Harry. They were there, steady on me.

"Can't see anything," Silver gasped. "Bloody explosion blinded me." He'd been staring right at it. "U-boat's at two o'clock to the formation, a tenth of a mile out, moving to three, must be travelling at six or seven knots. He can't have moved far—"

"Get on the radio and warn the destroyers, Tex," I ordered. "Tell 'em the coordinates and get 'em to drop a depth charge."

Then, to my pilots and gunners: “Stay low in case he surfaces.”

There wasn’t a damn thing we could do unless he surfaced; we weren’t bombed up to sink him, and we couldn’t fire guns at him underwater.

But if he did surface, he could shoot at us, too.

The sky and sea had seemed so calm a moment ago. Now everything was on fire. Below us, a frantic rescue was going on. The sea was alight with oil and fuel and flame—the men on the sinking ship might burn before they drowned.

“They got a lifeboat away! Two of ’em!” Silver yelled. “Eleven o’clock to the cruiser. Pass the word, Tex, send someone to pick ’em up!”

I circled over the frantic sea and fired a flare to light the surface, looking for survivors.

“Think that U-boat’s gone?” I muttered.

“If he has any sense!” Silver answered.

We dogged the sinking ship until the rescuers gave up.

There wasn’t anything else any of us could do. They’d beaten us again.

“Cheer up, Scotty,” Silver said as we headed to Windyedge. “The lads behaved for you this time.”

Ellen:

I heard 648 Squadron roar in before daylight, and in a flash I was out of bed and leaning from the bathroom window. The planes were lining up over Kingsleap Light, lit specially for our lads, blazing green beneath the waning moon. The Blenheims raged past and I shrieked out into the dark, “Hurrah! *Hurrah!*”

I went downstairs with my shawl over my night things to boil a kettle. I’d have to rush to the airfield as soon as I dressed. Mrs. Campbell was pottering about, pink-cheeked and excited.

“The lads are back!” she cried. “Did you count the planes?”

“Four of ’em! A section and a transport!”

“Maybe they’ll visit today!” Nan said.

Madeira had landed when I got to the airfield. Pimms turned up in full daylight, about ten o’clock in the morning on Wednesday, 20 November 1940.

And there was my old friend Jamie, bonny Jamie Stuart, hoisting himself through the hatch to get out of the Blenheim.

He looked about ten years older than when he’d left Windyedge six weeks ago.

It gave me a shock. His narrow face was thinner, those bright hazel eyes ringed with shadow. I knew 648 Squadron had taken a few knocks since I’d seen them. The Blenheims always did, and the airmen were always shattered after a night in the sky. But Jamie had a whipped-dog air about him, angry and desperate, that I didn’t recognize.

He looked around at the moors to the west. The heather had been in a blaze of purple bloom when he was here at summer’s end, and now it was dull with winter’s coming and a thin layer of frost. The same thing had happened to him.

The other Pimms airmen were climbing out of their Blenheims.

Jamie watched them and his face relaxed a mite. He was counting them in just the way we did. He jumped down off the wing.

“*Whoo!*” Jamie gave a yell. “We’re home!”

I was hanging around his neck almost before his feet touched the ground.

“*Jamie Stuart!* Alive and whole! Hurrah, *hurrah!*” I kissed him for old times, though we’d never been true sweethearts.

He gave me a warm squeeze but gently pushed my face away. “Not in front of the lads, Volunteer McEwen.”

When did Jamie Stuart ever worry about good form? Not himself *at all*.

“You all right?” I asked.

He nodded. “Just damned if I’ll fly another escort mission without armament. This *bloody* new commander—you’ll meet him tomorrow, he’s at Deeside just now—we don’t see eye to eye on *anything*.”

I didn’t like the sound of that. He’d be my commander, too.

“You need a warm Windyedge welcome,” I said. “Down the pub!”

The Pimms lads who knew Windyedge were piling into the Tilly and rocking it to make the rest join them.

“Debriefing!” wailed Flight Officer Phyllis Pennyworth.

“Och, debriefing can wait,” I exclaimed. She was too good sometimes. “Debrief ’em in the Limehouse! Come on, Phyllis....”

She gave up, and climbed in front next to me.

All nine Pimms lads sang their hearts out for the short ride, and Phyllis seemed tired and happy. How she managed to keep her air-force blue so smart after flying from Shetland in the back of someone’s Blenheim I do not know.

“Oh, Ellen, it’s good to be back here,” Phyllis said to me. “Are we still roommates?”

“Mrs. Campbell’s already made up your bed!” Nan loved that English robin of a WAAF officer almost as much as she loved the lads. And Nan must have heard the Tilly straining up the hill, because the door was open and she was waiting when we pulled up out front.

She wasn’t the only one waiting for us. Jane was in the big chair by the fire, leaning forward to spy as we came in. Louisa was at the piano and spun around on the stool to get a keek.

We came in belting “Goodnight, Sweetheart.” I was arm in arm with Jamie-lad, and behind us came Phyllis with *two* lads, Ignacy on one side and Derfel on the other. She was pinker-cheeked even than Nancy Campbell. Pimms Section, 648 Squadron, stamped

muck off their boots in the vestibule and threw their greatcoats over chairs. They tossed caps onto tabletops and scraped furniture out of the way, warbling like a flock of off-pitch nightingales.

They wore air-force blue woolen trousers and fleece-lined leather jackets, and a few of them were still in their coverall flight suits with isinglass map holders strapped to their thighs. They made the low ceiling seem lower, the whole wide room a mite more tight. They brought with them the whiff of salt wind and oil and sweat, a reek of men and machinery.

Louisa spun back to the piano and found the right notes on its ivory keys, and she started playing along to "Goodnight, Sweetheart." Now that the lads had a tune to follow, they pulled their voices together. Then Jane joined in singing too, and it was—well—that woman's voice!

It was astonishing.

For one whole chorus we all just stood as we were, still, to listen to her sing.

Then the lads joined in, shouting their goodnights, though none of us was anyone's sweetheart, and it was broad daylight.

There was no holy pause at the end. They started jawing at once, carrying on for drink, and thumping on the bar.

"Mrs. Campbell, that fire's not nearly hot enough! I told these new kids you always have a fire going!"

That was Chip Wingate, the American, the one they called Tex.

Derfel Cledwyn, the Welsh navigator who used to be in another flight section, snatched peat logs from the stack. He pushed them into the grate below the wishing-tree mantel. Flames roared and sparks soared, and the lads joined their voices into one big bawl of a chant.

"Nan-cy! Nan-cy!"

"Come on, Nan Campbell, get behind that bar, we've missed you—"

"Nan-cy!"

Our Nan was a new woman! She shone like the morning star, twenty years falling off her face in a moment. She glowed as if every one of these loud, foul, jaggy, bristly lads were her true love come home from a year at sea.

"My darlins, you know it's not permitted hours yet. Opening time is half eleven."

They all moaned with disappointment, even the ones who'd

never seen her before in their lives.

“Just like a Scotswoman!”

“Only a month till Christmas, Nancy Scrooge!”

“And we’ve been in the air all night—”

“And Flight Officer Pennyworth needs something to fortify her so she can make her report—”

Old Nan’s eyes shone as if they were full of tears. “Not a drop will be served until half past eleven,” she said in a high voice.

“It’s already gone noon in Norway,” said Jamie.

“Too right!” Silver agreed. “Only three hundred miles away, an hour and a half in a Blenheim, closer than London!”

Everyone went back to drumming on the shining brass countertop, and Nan lifted the wooden yett to let herself behind the bar. There was a great howl and a thunder of applause.

“No, no, no!”

Awash with pleasure, wisps of hair escaping their glittery grips and getting in her eyes, Nan Campbell smacked someone’s hands away from the ale taps and primly began screwing on the nozzles. “Now, Chip, you know better!”

“Huh!”

Our Chip was a short and sturdy lad, with stubbled hair that made his head look like a worn-out scrubbing brush. He set to complaining. “Aw, there’s no policemen in sight, and that hill’s so steep y’all can hear anything pulling up a mile away. Just one of your ‘wee drams,’ ma’am—no one will know!”

“Not until eleven thirty!” said Nan firmly. “I keep lawful hours.”

Chip jerked his thumb over his shoulder, toward Louisa at the piano across the room.

“If you’re so law-abiding, what’s the little darkie doing in here?”

I flinched and froze with hate.

In my head I heard “filthy tinker” in place of “little darkie.” As if I *expected* it. It took a moment to realize he was being rude about Louisa and not about me.

And the stupid thing was that, being American, Chip wouldn’t have known me for a Traveller if I’d pitched a tent in his granny’s garden.

But the others would, the Scots and English and Welsh.

I knew how Louisa felt. Everybody turned to clap eyes on her,

as if she'd been caught trying to nick something.

She leaped to her feet suddenly, pushing herself up with one hand on the piano keyboard so that it let out a crashing angry groan. She looked as if she were choosing whether to fight or to run.

She was holding it in. She was *good* at holding it in. But I could see she was afire with anger.

I'd hidden my secret from these lads so well that now I was too feartie to open my gob and speak up for Louisa. As if she'd never sat between me and an enemy pilot with a gun, whispering warmth into my ear and holding my cold hands until they stopped shaking. She was brave enough to do all that, and I couldn't say one word among friends for her!

My own mammy would be ashamed of me. *Ashamed.*

Louisa kept one hand on the piano keys as if that steadied her. She wore the wee frown that turned her bonny face into a pinched heart.

Then Jamie's friend Silver, all dark eyes and film-star good looks, spoke up for her. "You're maybe thinking of the law in Texas, Chippo. The law here is different."

They sometimes took the mick with Silver, too, because of him being Jewish. That didn't stop *him* speaking up; I suppose it is easier if you are an officer and a gentleman.

"Here it's a free country," added Derfel, the Welsh lad. "We even let filthy English in the place."

Everybody laughed.

"Louisa is here to assist my aunt Jane," said Nan. "That's Mrs. Warner to you lads."

"Lay off Nancy's guests, Tex," said Jamie.

You know, he is a wisp of a man, so short and slight and fair. And that boys' school accent, as toffee-nosed as Robert Ethan's. But Jamie is no coward. I have seen him fight with the steely purpose of a gamekeeper going after a poacher. His face closed up as he turned to Chip—lost the sunny smile, as if the effort of giving a command exhausted him, so different to his usual self before he'd gone up to Shetland.

But he added in a friendly way, "Nice to meet you, Louisa."

"Nice to have someone at the piano, too!" Silver put in.

I pulled up a chair by Jane. "Come along, lasses, safety in numbers," I said, and I beckoned to Louisa. I still felt guilty for not

saying anything myself, but at least I could make her welcome.

So me and Phyllis and Louisa and Jane settled in around the table by the fire. As I tucked in my chair I gave Louisa a quick pat on the knee. She was trembling with holding in her anger.

"Don't let it fash you," I whispered. "You're British and he isn't."

Phyllis leaned over to shake her hand. "Hello, Louisa. Hello, Mrs. Warner! I'm Phyllis Pennyworth—I'll be staying here as well."

Jane was like an excited kiddie at a pantomime, leaning forward, her pale blue eyes wide and alight. "Tell us who's who," she said to me.

"Aye, well! I don't ken them all myself. Some of the lads are new." I tried not to think about the old ones, the missing ones. "The young man I came in with, fair hair and fox's face, that's Jamie Stuart. He's got a heart of gold. You have any trouble with the others, Louisa, you take it straight to Jamie and he'll put it right. He's a pilot, the commander for B-Flight. Two sections, Pimms and Madeira, six aircraft, eighteen men. They take him pretty seriously."

Did they? They used to. Silver still seemed to take him seriously.

"His best mate is his navigator, the Prince Charming with the good manners," I added. "David Silvermont. He plays the fiddle, proper classical stuff—you'll like him too. They get called Silver and Scotty."

"Aren't they all Scotty?" Louisa asked.

"Jamie's the only Scot in the squadron," I said, keeping my voice down. "The RAF squadrons come from all over. Aw, look at them. They're like Nan's bairns, her own babies. She doesn't even ken half of them—those Aussie lads are all new."

"Chip Wingate, the American, he's her favorite," Phyllis said. "He doesn't need to be here: the USA is neutral, they haven't entered the war. But he came anyway. She thinks he's the most heroic of the bunch."

Jane rapped her fingernails against her teacup.

"I don't understand," she said, "how anyone fighting the principles of Nazism, which envisions a master race that does not include the Negro, can articulate a complaint against a colored person visiting a free establishment and not choke on his own hypocrisy."

I shrugged. "Everybody thinks the world belongs to them. The

Scots and the English aren't any better. Just different. Chip's a bit of a lad, never shuts up, always looking for a fight. But *look*. See why Nan loves him?"

He had his silvery toothbrush head down on the bar with his chin resting on his hands, and he was blinking up at Mrs. Campbell like a loving pup. She swiped at him with a dishcloth. He was minding her rules, but he was making her sorry.

Louisa gave a wee superior sniff and looked away.

"Chip's the gunner for Jamie and Silver now," Phyllis said. "They've all swapped round. They had a rough time this month." She yawned, and added anxiously, "We ought to introduce them by their proper ranks, you know. Scotty's got a name a mile long, the Honorable James Gordon Erskine Murray Beaufort-Stuart. Volunteer McEwen is much too familiar with him."

"Och, he's no' fussed about his name!" I protested. "And I've known him longer than you. Since he was in school. I knew his family from before the war."

Phyllis yawned again. "I have to interrogate him every morning," she said. "I know him pretty well. I know 'em all pretty well. Even the new ones."

The Australians were mucking about on the hearth, building a castle with peat blocks. Phyllis pointed them out one by one.

"They all went to the same school and joined the air force together. None of 'em a day over eighteen, and you wouldn't believe they were that old if it wasn't on their papers. The ginger lad with the great mop of hair, that's Dougie Kerr, their wireless op and gunner. The one who looks like he's only about twelve, that's their navigator, Gavin Hamilton. Harry Morrow is their pilot—the scarecrow. Harry shouldn't really be a pilot—he's too tall, doesn't *fit*. He has to fly with his knees up around his ears. He's a terrible softy—he's got a photograph of his dogs back in Sydney that he sticks on the dashboard when he flies!"

The peat block castle tower fell to pieces. Sparks flew in the hearth, and our Jamie pushed himself away from the counter and grumbled, "Och, you can do better than that, surely, lads? Give it a bit of a base. Get the bricks interlocking as they go on up—come and lend a hand, Silver. These children don't know anything about construction."

So Britain's finest set to work turning the Limehouse hearth into a building site.

“The third pilot’s Polish,” Phyllis finished. “Ignacy Mazur. He’s the one with the grand mustache—don’t you think it suits him? He *walked* across half of Europe to get here, after the Germans invaded Poland. Speaks pretty good English now, and a bit of Welsh, too, believe it or not. His navigator, Derfel Cledwyn, is Welsh. Derfel’s the one with the squashed nose.”

Louisa said, “What a funny name.”

“A Welsh name,” I said. “But he gets called Taff. Also because he’s Welsh. All Welshmen are Taff, just like all Scotsmen are Scotty, and the Texan is Tex.”

Phyllis laughed. “But their gunner’s just plain English, Bill Yorke—the other mustache, the thin one. He transferred from another squadron. I haven’t worked out Bill yet: a bit quiet. Unhappy about something, I expect. Perhaps he’s not quite used to Ignacy and Derfel shouting at each other in Polish and Welsh when they’re dropping bombs. They’re pretty tight, and he might feel left out.”

Jane laughed suddenly.

“It sounds to me,” she said, “as if they are your babies as well as Nancy’s.”

“They’re not our babies at all,” said Phyllis warmly. “They’re our brothers.”

Jamie:

The lads counted down the seconds to half past eleven as if it were the New Year.

“Seven! Six! Five—”

They drummed on the brass countertop and stamped on the stone floor, chorusing, *“Four! Three! TWO! ONE!”*

Nancy slid a pint glass beneath a tap and began to fill it with ale that foamed like liquid carnelian.

“See, we can cooperate when there’s a good reason for it,” Silver whispered, and I laughed.

“Who’s first, lads?” Mrs. Campbell called out.

I looked up at the black oak beam above the Limehouse bar. Gleaming silver, exactly where I left it, was the tanner I’d put there for luck six weeks ago. I swear, Nancy polished those coins while we were away. I reached up and twisted my shining sixpence out of the wood and slapped it down on the brass counter with a tinny clink.

“Make that one Silver’s,” I said. “I’m paying. Best observer in the RAF, he can see in the dark. Pull me a pint, too, while you’re at it, Mrs. C. I’m parched.”

“Right you are, Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart.”

She beamed at us over the taps, looking for faces she recognized. “How about you, Sergeant Wingate?”

“Sure thing, Nancy,” said Chip, and pulled his own sixpence from the beam.

When he turned around, Bill Yorke and the young Aussies were watching with interest. The wishing coins were new to them.

“You put a tanner or a bob up there before an op,” explained Derfel. “Then when you’re safe home, you take it out and buy yourself a drink.”

Along with me and Silver, Chip, and Derfel, Ignacy was the only one of us who had left a coin there. The rest were new to Windyedge, and had to dig into their pockets. Nancy began to hand round pints as fast as she could pull them.

Dougie started to take a sip.

“*Not yet,*” Ignacy warned. The Australians all looked at me, confused.

I shook my head. “Wait for everybody.”

No one drank. Silver was right; they *could* cooperate.

When everyone held a brimming glass, I raised my own toward the untouched coins still shining in the ceiling. “Absent friends.”

The murmur went around the room. *Absent friends.* The girls raised their teacups.

“Sergeant Colin Oldham,” Silver said quietly, holding up his pint to me.

“Cheers.”

We tapped each other’s glasses, remembering. Only two weeks ago.

“Och, you’ll soon learn our ways,” Nan told the new lads, her eyes wet and glinting. Then she went back to work, as she’d been doing for twenty-five years.

Everybody quieted down a bit now that there was something to drink. Nancy doled out tinned beef sandwiches. Bill Yorke pushed a chair across to sit next to the girls, and got out his cigarette papers. The first two he pulled out were torn, or wrinkled, or something, and instead of flattening them, he crumpled them up and dropped them in the ashtray. He rolled a cigarette for himself before offering them round.

Yorkie was nearly ten years older than the rest of us, a career RAF man, and his windburned face and thin mustache gave him a permanent cynical look. The West Indian lass edged away from him cautiously. I didn’t think she’d had much experience with men.

Bother, I thought; I ought to keep an eye on him.

But I knew that Phyllis already thought so too, and Ellen wouldn’t put up with any nonsense. And he wasn’t doing anything forward or suggestive—just being very generous with his cigarettes.

Louisa:

It was Ellen who fished the cigarette paper out of the ashtray.

She smoked faster than everybody else, no-fuss efficient. Phyllis looked like she was joining in to be polite, and Jane was taking her time, enjoying it. Bill Yorke showed me how to put my cigarette together, but I let it go out almost the second after he lit it. I'd never smoked, and I could just imagine what Mummy would say if I started now, in the pub surrounded by sweaty airmen! So everybody else puffed away around me.

Meanwhile I perched on the edge of my seat, trying not to show how excited and anxious I was, while they described how the U-boat sank the British ship and how maddening it had been not to be able to do any damage to it. Oh God, I knew how that felt. I was torn between wanting to leap up and tell them so, and choking on fresh anger that maybe Daddy's ship went down because it wasn't equipped to defend itself. Also, oh, I was *jealous*. I wanted to be Jamie Beaufort-Stuart, pointing my guns at the deadly underwater shadow. I wanted to be David Silvermont, able to see in the dark, up in the nose of the Blenheim, spotting lifeboats. I even wanted to be Chip Wingate, rescuing survivors by radio. I *ached* with it.

And I wished I knew how to smoke, because it would have been something to do with my hands, a way to pretend I was calmer than I felt. I thought of Mummy sitting on the veranda by herself one evening in May of 1935, quietly guarding the house by the light of her cigarette. Daddy was away and I was only ten. There'd been strikes and riots in the northern ports off and on all that month, and then, in a protest march in Kingston that day, a woman was shot by the police. Mummy didn't seem scared; but she smoked and smoked all alone on the veranda long after she'd told me to go to bed.

I am pretty sure that Ellen picked up the crumpled cigarette paper just because she wanted another cigarette and didn't want to ask Bill Yorke for one. I wouldn't have either; I didn't like him any more than I liked Chip. He leaned in too close to your face when he talked, and kept clasping your knee or shoulder when you weren't

looking. I saw Ellen unfold the crumpled paper, frown faintly, and put it in her pocket. She reached for the other he'd tossed away and did the same thing.

I picked up my own unsmoked cigarette and handed it to her.

"Have this one!"

She gave me a cool nod. "Ta, Louisa." Then she got out her own box of matches to light it.

The young men from 648 Squadron stayed three hours, till afternoon closing. When it was time for Mrs. Campbell to shoo them away, two of the Australians—Harry, the tall pilot, and Dougie, the gunner with the wild gingery hair—had fallen asleep at the long table in the middle of the pub with their heads pillowed on their arms among the empty glasses.

"Flying all night will do that," Phyllis told us.

Jane said it made her feel exhausted just thinking about it.

"I'd better go open up the Tilly," said Ellen. "They'll never make it back on foot."

Bill Yorke, too, had fallen asleep, slumped in his chair in his flight suit by the fire with his legs spread and his elbows cocked on the wooden armrests. Ignacy and Derfel, the Pole and the Welshman, were still awake, but they were slouching against each other's shoulders as if they couldn't sit without support. Pimms Section's commander, slender, sly-faced Jamie Beaufort-Stuart, looked relaxed now, but bone-tired. He was deep in conversation with good-looking David Silvermont, and as I watched I saw them click their mostly-empty glasses together again.

Ellen stood up and reached for her overcoat. Jane lifted one drooping hand, like a dying opera heroine, and asked her, "You wouldn't happen to have another cigarette on you, would you, darling?"

"Aye, of course, Mrs. Warner!"

Ellen rummaged in her pockets. She came up with a battered paper packet of Woodbines and gave one to Jane.

The cigarette paper she'd fished out of the ashtray fell out of her pocket.

I didn't see it till she'd gone, along with everybody else. By then, Jane had smoked her Woodbine and decided she needed to go upstairs to lie down and "rest her eyes." As I was getting up to help Jane with her sticks I noticed the crumpled piece of cigarette paper beneath the table.

I only picked it up because I thought Ellen might want it back. Wartime rationing makes everybody terribly thrifty. It was a piece of paper not much bigger than a few postage stamps! Isn't it strange how you follow along when somebody else does something?

In any case, I picked it up and was about to put it in my pocket when I realized why Ellen had saved it—and why Bill Yorke had tossed it away.

It was covered with blocks and blocks of letters, beginning with two meaningless groups of three letters apiece and the rest in rows of five, lines of nonsense marching down the thin sheet. I couldn't read it. I mean, I could read the *letters*; they were neat block capitals, evenly printed. But they didn't say anything—they didn't make words that meant anything.

Whatever it said, it was in code.

Back upstairs in Room Five, Jane lay on the bed and rested her eyes.

I sat down and opened a book. But I kept thinking about the cigarette paper with the rows of meaningless letters. I felt like it was burning an imaginary hole in my skirt pocket. Was it important? No, it couldn't be, or Bill Yorke wouldn't have tossed it in the ashtray. But what if he'd done that because he wanted to get rid of it? Had Ellen noticed the writing—did she wonder what it meant?

I pulled the paper out of my pocket and spread it flat on my open book, like a bookmark. The sheet was covered back and front with the rows of printed letters. Bill Yorke was the wireless operator for his flight crew as well as their gunner—he must have taken this down in the air not long ago. Maybe only last night.

Then I had a wild thought.

I had a coding machine and I had a coded message. Perhaps I could put the two together.

By now, Jane was snoring gently as she rested her eyes. I shut my book on the cigarette paper and went to the wardrobe. When I opened it and dug out the coding machine and the box of extra rotors, Jane didn't stir. So I picked everything up, and my book and a pencil too, and let myself out of the room.

I listened for anyone in the passage. But Phyllis had gone with Ellen to deliver the 648 Squadron airmen to their barracks, and Mrs. Campbell was downstairs washing up. I made my way quietly

down the passage and into the loo—the toilet was separate from the bathroom, right next to it in a little closet with a door and an arrow-slit window of its own.

I locked the door and sat down on the loo with the book on my knees and the coding machine at my feet. I felt like Pandora as I opened the beautiful wooden box.

Jane and I had left Felix Baer's leaflets lying beneath the lid on top of the keyboard. I opened the first booklet. I couldn't read the German headings, but Jane had explained to me how to match up the rotors and plugs. The two groups of three letters on Bill Yorke's cigarette paper told me where the message began. I knew from Felix Baer's instructions that when I keyed them in with today's settings, they'd give me the starting letters for the rotor dials. I took a deep breath and began to type. I didn't really believe it would work.

I couldn't decode it quickly. There weren't any proper words to look at or remember. I had to do it letter by letter, and pay attention to make sure I was hitting the right keys. I hadn't thought to bring extra paper, so as the decoded letters lit up in the upper keyboard, I wrote them down on the blank endpaper at the back of my book.

After five minutes of struggle and with my back starting to ache from leaning down to the floor to hit the keyboard, I sat up and read in my notebook what the lamplit letters had spelled out:

FEIND LICHE NSCHL ACHTS CHIFF E...

It didn't look like nonsense.

I tried rewriting it by putting spaces between some of those bunches of consonants, and got:

FEIND LICHENS CHLACHTS CHIFFE...

And *that* looked like *German*.

The hair stood up at the back of my neck.

I couldn't read this, but I could tell it was real words. Maybe I hadn't split them the right way. But those letters meant something.

And with the cipher machine, *I'd worked it out myself*.

For a moment I was so excited I thought I was going to be sick.

I thumped my fist on the floor. Then I regretted that in case anyone heard it. I was all cooped up in this tiny little room and I

wanted to shout and jump up and down, but there wasn't room to do anything, and also I knew this was as secret as secret could be, and whatever I did, I mustn't shout.

I had to tell Jamie Beaufort-Stuart. I had to figure out the whole message, and then the next time his squadron of Blenheim bombers went flying out over the North Sea, they'd know ahead of time what they were going to run into.

So the only thing to do was to sit there and decode the rest of it.

I was about to explode with excitement when I finally went back to Room Number Five. I felt as if I were tumbling to earth in a bomb dropped from a plane, Luftwaffe or RAF, I couldn't quite work out which.

Jane was sitting in her armchair in the chilly room. The radio was switched off and she wasn't reading. Her face was blank, but her expression changed as I came in. She looked away from me quickly, the way you'd pretend to be innocent if you were caught on your way to scamper up a neighbor's tree after their tamarinds, but you weren't actually anywhere near the tree yet.

"I tried to light the fire and it wouldn't go on," Jane said cautiously, still not meeting my eyes.

She hadn't had to do that on her own before. She couldn't kneel, though she was very good at leaning over, and could even touch her toes, to make up for her knees hardly bending at all. It was an awkward way to get at the fire.

Guilt tore through me. I put down the cipher machine carefully, and laid the book on top of it—excited as I was, *Jane* was my first responsibility, and I'd left her here alone in the cold for half an hour at least. I looked at the meter. There was no gas flowing.

"It needs another shilling," I said. "Oh, Jane, I'm so sorry! Why didn't you call me? I was just down the passage in the loo!" I reached for the shilling jar and dropped in a coin. There was a moment of very quiet stillness in which I could hear the meter start to whir. I bent down to turn on the gas tap so I could light the fire.

And then I realized that the gas was already on.

She'd turned on the gas tap and hadn't turned it off again. If she'd started the meter herself without lighting the fire, the gas could have run and run, and filled the room. Maybe she would have sat there in the cold until she fell asleep again. How long would it

be before the gas killed you?

It looked like an accident. But even so, what if I'd come back into the room and found her stone dead? After the warning I'd been given—how could I *bear* it? Just the thought of it made my eyes prick with tears. Accident or on purpose—I didn't know which would be worse. And it would be my fault for leaving her alone if anything happened, my fault for not being there with her.

I could scarcely bear even to think about it.

I knelt to light the fire and turned it up. I wanted her to get warm.

“*Tell me* when you want the fire on,” I begged. “Please just *tell me*. Don't try to do it yourself. Let me take care of it. I'm sorry I was away so long just now—”

I glanced over at the wooden box by the door, and my stomach jumped again. I looked back at Jane, and the excitement came flooding back.

Jane met my eyes at last.

“What have you been up to, Louisa?” she asked.

Jamie:

“Jamie! *Jamie Stuart!* Hold on a wee minute—”

Ellen leaned out of the Tilly, yelling, as I crossed to the Blenheims beneath the half-moon.

I’d been avoiding her, but I waited as the van pulled up. Ellen was an old friend, a *good* friend. And here was I, not daring to return a fond greeting in case someone threw it back at me as bad behavior. I felt like a rotten coward.

“Hop in,” she said. “Och, don’t look like that, I’m not going to kiss you again.”

“I’m sorry!” I said. “It’s this bloody new commander. If he thinks I’m fooling around he’ll rake me over the coals, and Dougie Kerr can’t keep his gob shut.”

“Well, I’ve met Cromwell now and he doesn’t like me either,” Ellen said with sympathy. “Hop in, no one’s looking. I’ll take you across in a minute, but I want to talk to you....”

I threw my parachute, helmet, and gauntlets in the back and climbed in next to her. I ought to be grateful for the short ride; I was geared up, and walking isn’t easy in a flight suit full of Ever-Hot bags topped off with a Mae West.

Ellen put the van in neutral. She reached into a pocket of her ATS uniform and drew out a folded paper.

“Should I read this now?” I asked. The airfield was darkness and inky shadows. The lights would only be turned on for takeoff. Anything that showed might attract German bombers.

“I’ll tell you what it says.” She paused. “It’s a coded message.”

I didn’t know what to think. I sat silent, waiting for her to go on.

“It’s a bit of the message you overheard on the wireless yesterday,” she added in a low voice.

I turned sharply to look at her, but it was too dark to read her face. “How do you know about that?”

“Your gabby new Australian sparks was blethering about it at Mrs. Campbell’s. His pilot shut him up. You were busy buying Tex

another beer.”

“Oh, Lord!” Bloody Dougie Kerr. “How did you get it on paper?”

“That was Bill Yorke, your other new sparks,” said Ellen.

I shook my head in despair, and she gave a low, dry chuckle. “It’s like being stuck with a bunch of schoolkids, aye?”

“Half of them *are* a bunch of schoolkids,” I pointed out. “Is this the best time to tell me? I’m away on an op in ten minutes.”

“Don’t be fashed. It’s not what you think. And I’m not Cromwell.” She took a deep breath. “I know what the message says.”

We sat in the van in the dark, and I stared at Ellen without being able to see her.

I unfolded the paper and flattened it against my leg. Ellen lit a match and held it over a page torn from an ordinary school jotter, just long enough for me to see the writing: printed lines of clear English, beneath recognizable German, beneath unrecognizable code.

I didn’t have time to read anything before Ellen shook the match out.

She spoke quietly, hesitating. It was a long time since we’d seen each other, and she knew I’d lost most of my squadron a couple of weeks ago, and it made us awkward.

“Yorkie—is that what you call him?” she began. “Bill Yorke, the English bloke with the mustache. He wrote the code on his cigarette papers. I saw it when he tossed them away at Mrs. Campbell’s before. And I picked ’em up—”

“Traveller habit,” I scolded her. “You’ll get caught.”

“Shut yer gob, Jamie Stuart.” The familiar teasing made her less uneasy. “Well, I didn’t get a keek before I’d dropped one of the papers myself, and then Louisa, that West Indian lass who looks after Nan’s old auntie, picked it up next. She’s that canny, Louisa is, sharpest eyes I’ve ever seen, and that’s saying something.”

“Fair do’s.”

We both know the Beaufort-Stuarts have a reputation that way.

“Louisa took it and worked out what it meant,” Ellen said.

“How the devil did she do that?”

“Och, well...” Ellen hesitated. “This is the mad bit.”

“Hurry up!”

“Windyedge had an unexpected visitor....”

Ellen told me about the German pilot. She told me about "Odysseus," and how Louisa discovered the gift he'd left.

I knew it was true, because it fit. Even without the code name Odysseus, which I'd overheard, the jigsaw pieces fit. Odysseus flew the missing Messerschmitt, the one we never saw. The other Messerschmitt, the one we tangled with, was trying to stop him from completing his mission.

And his mission was to deliver this cipher machine.

"So he hid the machine and Louisa found it, and she made it work," Ellen finished. "She couldn't have done it without his list of settings, but she found that too."

"Does she read German?"

"No," Ellen said softly. "She got the old woman to translate. So they both know."

I whistled.

Foes' gifts are no gifts, warned my classical education. The real Odysseus's gift had been a trap.

"Did he bring it for *us*?" I asked. "For 648 Squadron?"

"I don't know. I never heard of anything like it."

"Neither did I," I breathed.

Ellen held another match over the page.

"See. It's an alert to their pilots about the U-boat you met, telling them where to find our ships. If you'd known that when the message came in, you could have warned the navy. Or done something about it."

The match was burning low.

"There's more," she said, and shook that flame out too. "I'll tell you this but once. You can get Silver to read it properly after you've set off." She lit a final match, but only used it to light a cigarette. She said in a low voice, "The last part tells where the German submarines will be tonight."

I sat agog, my mouth hanging open.

"Just off Bell Rock Light," she added. "It says. A 'wolf pack,' they call it, six of 'em hunting together. Their coordinates look like Jerry military mumbo-jumbo to me, but Bell Rock's clear enough."

She laughed at me gaping, and held her cigarette to my lips. I took a long drag, but the faint red glow wasn't bright enough to light the miraculous sheet of paper lying in my lap.

What had I said to Phyllis, on the morning of 7 November, two weeks ago?

I want to know where their submarines are. Some wee thing. One surprising smack in their faces.

"Buckets of blood, I have to get going," I said. "Drive."

I folded the page and tucked it into my thigh pocket, and pelted Ellen with questions as she drove.

"How can we trust the old woman? Maybe she's just having fun with the girl. And what about her—Louisa—you only met her this week! Isn't she terribly young? Is this cipher machine real, anyway? Have you seen it yourself?"

"I don't know. Maybe. Aye, she's young. And no, I have not. But I *can* tell you Louisa is as sound as you or me. Braver than me. You should have seen her stand up to that Jerry! I trust her, and she trusts Jane, and—"

"*And we've nothing to lose.*" I couldn't believe my luck. "You know what? I'd rather go on a wild-goose chase for Nan Campbell's old auntie than take another blind order from Wing Commander Talbot Cromwell."

Ellen pulled up by my Blenheim and told me, "Louisa says you were lucky. She only managed to work it out because it was a full transmission. If any bit's missing, the letters get in a guddle. So tell your sparks to take care what he copies down."

The plane loomed above us, shadow on shadow; Chip was a stocky, smaller shadow heffalumping about against the sky as he climbed into the rear hatch. We were being sent on patrol again, bombed up this time, to escort navy ships heading into Edinburgh through the Firth of Forth.

Silver yanked open the door of the Tilly.

"Thank goodness you're here; I was worried I'd have to do the flying myself tonight," he said. "Then you really *would* be in trouble."

"You have *no idea*." I grabbed my gear and jumped out. I didn't think about whether what I'd do next would get me in trouble—I might never get a chance like this again. "Have you plotted our course? I want to take us on a little detour."

"Where'd you get this?" Silver asked. He sat at the navigator's chart table in the Blenheim's nose, juggling an electric torch and his wind-direction calculator. "This is Tex's code! Translated! But—"

"You cracked the Kraut?" Chip called from the back. "I thought special codebreakers had to do that."

"Special codebreakers did do it," I said evasively.

The intercom crackled as Silver started to talk but changed his mind. Finally he said, "East of the Bell Rock Light! Twenty minutes down the Angus Coast. Well, it's not far off where we're meeting tonight's convoy..." Over the dashboard, I couldn't see what he was doing as he changed our route. "Are Pimms and Madeira going together?"

"No, I'm going to send Madeira on to Edinburgh alone. Then no one can accuse B-Flight of being late."

"Will this get you another reprimand?"

"Probably."

"It's your funeral," said Silver cheerfully.

Fifteen minutes after we took off, Chip called out, "I'm getting more of those danged coded signals."

I shivered in the heavy flight suit, but kept my hands steady on the controls, followed my course, watched the quiet moon.

"Take down as much of it as you can," I said to him. "*Get it all.*"

No one questioned me when I ordered Adam Stedman to keep Madeira Section on track for the convoy, and Bell Rock wasn't far out of our way. The lighthouse there had been shot up by a swarm of German bombers not long ago, so it stayed dark unless British ships were about. Tonight it was lit. That was a good enough excuse for checking it out. I knew I could trust Silver with our secret; I could tell him later, and I wouldn't need to confess to Phyllis or Cromwell.

"We'll catch up to you in a jiffy," I said to Adam. "I want to sweep around the lighthouse." To Pimms I said, "Stay with me."

I passed the light, and we kept going, following our strange instructions twenty miles farther out to sea. We could still see Bell Rock gleaming. Silver peered through the observer's window up front, and I glided lower to get a better view.

Gunshot suddenly exploded around us.

I felt the shock as it hit, somewhere in the back of the plane. But the control surfaces held.

I called to Ignacy and Harry. "*Climb away, Pimms!*"

"*What the—*" yelled Chip—of course he couldn't see anything, sitting at the radio behind me. "That went right past my ear!"

"You okay? Get in the turret—"

"Two German submarines," Silver confirmed. "Right next to

each other. They've both come up for air; you'll see when we turn around. What do you think, Scotty? Apart from their guns they're sitting ducks."

"Ouch!" I kicked at the rudder—it felt like I'd been stung by a wasp, and instinctively I tried to shake it off. A wasp in the plane in November, what the devil? Must be a leg cramp. I flexed my calf and focused on keeping the wings level.

"They must know we've got ships passing," I answered Silver. "So we'd better try to take them out."

It wasn't as if the hand we were playing was a sure bet. Most of the Blenheims that didn't make it home got shot down by antiaircraft fire from the ground or from ships at sea.

But we'd surprised *them* this time—those U-boats were at their most vulnerable. They can't dive when they're taking on air.

Silver suddenly started to laugh.

"What? What?"

"*There's another*—it just came up! You wait and wait for one, and they all come along at once—"

"*Like London buses!*" we howled in chorus.

"Hey, pipe down, you two," Tex complained. "Are we going for them or not?"

"All Pimms aircraft, line up behind me," I called to Ignacy Mazur and Harry Morrow. "I'm on the near one, Mazur in the middle, Morrow last. Morrow! You know what you're doing? When your load's away, climb and head to meet Madeira."

"Cheers to that, Pimms Leader!" yelled Harry Morrow. "About time we saw some serious combat!"

We lined up for the bombing run.

I flew as low as I dared through a hail of antiaircraft fire. My headset was full of Chip whooping it up in the rear turret as he fired back.

"*Great shot, boys!* Right between them—Mazur's load went down on the other side of that middle sub—there she blows! Aw, I can't tell what happened, it just looks like a giant geyser—no, wait, *the Morrow kid made a direct hit!*"

Mazur's victory yell came crackling over the radio.

"*All three, we got all three of the bastards—*"

I looked over my shoulder as I climbed away.

The side-by-side submarines stood nearly on end as the explosions lifted them out of the water, like great whales breaching

in the dark. Their wet hulls gleamed silver in the moonlight and then sank again, going slowly straight down like ships that have struck an iceberg.

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Ellen:

B-Flight came safe home next morning, but not completely sound, because all three of Pimms Section's Blenheims were full of holes. Jamie's one was like a sieve, and he got hit in the leg, just a tiny hole in his flight suit and a neat graze in the back of his calf. He wasn't a mite fashed. Proud of it, pleased it was him and not anyone else who got hurt. Silver made him strip off his boots and flight suit right there in the shade of their plane to make sure he wasn't bleeding to death. Jamie looked like a schoolboy sitting on the frosty grass in his rumpled blue uniform and socks, with Silver bent over his leg playing doctors and nurses.

"I'm hoping for a wound stripe," Jamie told me, grinning. "For my sleeve. A decoration will impress the lads."

"All you're going to get is a dab of Dettol and some sticking plaster, mate," Silver told him.

Jamie dragged on his boots and stood up.

"Go on and limp," said Silver. "Let's give Cromwell some drama. You've got some explaining to do."

He took one of Jamie's arms over his shoulder.

"If you're a fighter pilot and you shoot down five planes, that makes you an ace," Jamie told me, all full of himself. "We can't battle Messerschmitts, so we're counting U-boats. *We've just bagged three.*"

"*You what!*" I cried.

Those clear hazel eyes were blazing. He looked tired. Excited. *Alive.*

I wondered if the wound hurt more than he was letting on.

He said breathlessly, "Just two more, and then I reckon Pimms are all aces."

"Well done, Pimms!" I exclaimed. "You heading to the Limehouse to celebrate?"

"We've got to go get debriefed just now," Jamie said. "After."

Silver looked at the sky. "Another winter storm tonight, and the last November moon tomorrow. With weather and luck, no more

night flights until December. Plenty of time for the pub.”

“Aye, well, don’t imagine you’ll get a rest,” I told them. “Specially not you, Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart.”

“Not for one single second do I imagine that.” Jamie gave a hop, trying to look at the back of his leg in step with Silver, who was four inches taller than him. “I say, Volunteer McEwen, could you introduce me to Nan’s old auntie? I need to learn a bit more German, and I want to chat to her about some lessons.”

“*Scotty!*” Silver scolded. “Cromwell will have your head if he hears.”

“I’ll hide in a tree, like Charles the Second. Silver, do stop fussing—I’ll let you in on things in a moment,” Jamie said. The grin was back. “Oh, and Ellen? Here’s that ten bob I owe your dad—”

“What ten bob?”

He rolled his eyes. “Does *no one* trust me? Pass it along.”

In the Tilly on my own, I unfolded the banknote—very generous if he meant me to keep it. Just like a Beaufort-Stuart, throwing money about, even when they didn’t have any. A pilot’s salary is a deal higher than a driver’s, but it was likely his only income.

Hidden inside the ten shillings was a sheet of notepaper from Jamie’s wireless operator. It was covered with blether in Chip’s sprawling American print. Rows and rows of five letters apiece, none of it anything like words.

Pass it along, Jamie had said.

I thought I might send the ten bob to my dad as he’d bid me. But I knew who the pencil scrawl was meant for, and it wasn’t old Alan McEwen.

I had a guess what Jamie was up to. And I thought this would help him, and I wanted to help him. So I did.

It should not have been the carry-on it was to get Louisa and Jane alone with me and Jamie for five minutes.

For several days of dreich misery, sleet whipped at RAF Windyedge, and you’d be surprised how busy our Jamie was kept when he wasn’t in the air. I was kept busy too. Phyllis could write her reports sitting in Nan Campbell’s office or in the bar at the Limehouse, but I had to be at the aerodrome to do my work. Each day I’d bicycle over (to save the Tilly’s petrol), in a great big mackintosh through the wet, up the long lane to the airfield. Then I

had to drive Wing Commander Cromwell over to Deeside to meet with 648 Squadron's A-Flight, or take a mechanic to Stonehaven to collect aeroplane parts from the rail station, or give Jamie and Adam Stedman a lift around the airfield to do inspections.

There wasn't room in the hangar for all B-Flight's aircraft, and icy spitters drove at the wings of the sad planes left outside. The sleet came down so hard that Adam and Jamie crawled up through the escape panels in the floor of each plane instead of opening the overhead hatches, while I sat in the Tilly, blowing on my fingers and watching through the streaming windows. One of the shot-up planes sat for nearly forty-eight hours before Jamie spied that water was seeping through the bullet holes. When he put his head up into the cabin he ducked back out sharpish. I could see him gagging.

"What is it?" I called, cranking the window down about an inch.

"The cabin's all full of mildew. Reeking with it! That's just happened in *two days*. Ugh. I'd better taxi her into the hangar or she'll be unflyable. Get someone out here with a starter for me, will you?"

And I left him and Adam peering up into the plane and holding their noses while I sped off on that errand.

Nobody wanted to walk to the pub through the mud and slush and falling sleet after a day like that, and I couldn't use the Tilly to drive them time and again.

Next day it was blowing a gale, though the sleet eased. Old Flash rang to say I wasn't needed at the aerodrome. I could have kissed him. At half past eleven on the button, Jamie's lot came singing past the limekilns.

"Jane, Jane, go upstairs," Louisa urged.

"Won't you play the piano for them again?"

"I will, but let's go upstairs on our own just now," Louisa said. She started from her chair beside the fire and snatched up Jane's sticks. "For a bit of quiet before the party starts."

The old woman caught on. For the first time since B-Flight's last mission, we four would be under the same roof. Jane took the sticks and hobbled out of the bar.

"What is it your old auntie drinks, Mrs. C.?" Jamie asked, pulling his tanner from the black oak beam. "Whisky and a drop of water? I'll treat."

"Not for sixpence," Nancy said firmly. "Not even for you. That'll be two and six."

"Highway robbery," he complained. "How does she afford it?"

"She doesn't. She had two the day she arrived, and that's that. Take her a pot of tea if you want to be nice."

"Feels a bit mean, Nancy."

"Oh!" I said, getting a dig in. "Wasn't there something about ten bob you owed someone, Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart?"

He shrugged. "I've not got it on me now."

Nancy was not to be moved. So it was tea.

"Very proper, too," Jamie said solemnly.

"Come on, Jamie Stuart, I'll help you through the doors with the tea tray," I offered.

"I shouldn't allow Scotty around that fine woman without a chaperone," Silver agreed.

Jamie gave him a halfhearted clout. "Jealous."

"Just wondering what you're up to!"

"I'll tell you when I find out," Jamie said.

At last. Four days gone, and I hadn't once caught Jamie or Louisa alone without Phyllis or Silver tagging along. I held the hall door for Jamie, and led him upstairs and down the passage to Room Number Five.

Louisa let us in. Jane sat by the unlit fire wrapped in a woolly blanket—of course, it wasn't three o'clock yet. Some jazz singer was warbling on the wireless, sat like a queen on a doily taking up most of the dresser. Jamie perched the tea tray on a shaky table covered with another doily, and for a wee while we all looked at one another without saying anything.

Then Mrs. Warner said, "Show them, Louisa."

Louisa leaped to the wardrobe and delved behind furs and a forest of skinkling, gauzy gowns that I could not see either of them ever wearing. She came up with the Jerry pilot's precious wooden box, and she set that on the bed and undid the lid. There was a school jotter laid over the keys. She picked that up and, solemn as a judge, passed it to Jamie.

He stood gawping at the thing in the box. It wasn't quite a radio and it wasn't quite a typewriter.

"What is it?" Jamie breathed.

"The cleaning instructions say it's a cipher machine," said Louisa. "And—well, I guess it is. You know about the German pilot

who landed here, don't you? He left the machine, and he left lists of settings for it. We worked out the message that you picked up the other night—it's all in there." She waved at the jotter. "I did the decoding, and Jane did the translating. So we both know what it says." She swallowed, with that worried frown puckering her schoolgirl face. "I'm so afraid it will get Mrs. Warner in trouble."

"Not you?" said Jamie. He stepped closer, hesitated, and then pressed a key. A lamp came on in the top plate of letters.

"Well, me too, I suppose, but Mrs. Warner—" She stole a keek at Jane.

What the old woman confessed then made my mouth drop open.

"I am German," she explained softly. "A registered alien."

I'd never thought.

I'd never thought. Here was a body hiding the *exact* way I hid: behind an accent and a name and face and flesh like anybody's.

If people knew where she came from, what would they do? Who'd trust *her*?

But Louisa did trust her.

Mrs. Warner held her head up. "My stage name was Johanna von Arnim. I was *arrested*"—she sounded a mite proud of that—"last summer. They said I was a category-B detainee. After they arrested me, though, they demoted me to category-C. I was in prison for three weeks and then interred in a camp for another four months."

So that's what they did.

Nan must know. Mrs. Warner was her aunt. Crabbit Nancy Campbell was paying a wage to look after an old German woman!

"Did you do anything?" Jamie asked. "To make them arrest you?"

"If you mean *did I cause any risk to national security*, I should say not," said Jane. "But I'm telling you so you know."

He nodded. Then he glanced up at me.

For a moment I imagined it was a challenge, and he wanted me to give my own confession. But my secret didn't make me a war enemy. With his la-di-da private school and family castle it probably never crossed Jamie's mind that I was like Jane. He was just asking me if I trusted Mrs. Warner.

I nodded back to him.

"Well," said Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart of the Royal Air Force, and offered his hand to Jane to shake. "You helped us sink

three German U-boats the other night. And I'm telling you so *you* know."

She beamed at him over their clasped hands like a shopgirl making eyes at a film star.

"Aren't we lucky!" she exclaimed. "Isn't Windyedge lucky!"

"Yes," Jamie said, beaming right back at her. "Yes, at last we're going to be the lucky ones."

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Louisa:

He opened the jotter and held it so Ellen could read over his shoulder.

*SEA PATROL SHETLAND HOLD HALF MOON
ABERDEEN SECTOR CLEAR YEAR END
ABERDEEN SECTOR CLEAR START XII UNTIL FURTHER
NOTICE
JU LXXXVIII SPECIAL DETAIL LISTA TO DEESIDE SOUTH
GREEN LIGHT
ABERDEEN SECTOR AWAIT DS COMPLETION*

I worried that it sounded so mysterious. I said quickly, “We think the spacing’s right, but we’re not sure. There was a block of letter Xs between each line, so that seemed like where the breaks ought to be.”

Jamie Beaufort-Stuart stood studying the page, his face torn between joy and disbelief.

Jane patted the tufty bedspread, letting him know it was all right for him to sit down.

“Thank you, Mrs. Warner,” he said.

He sat carefully next to the coding machine and laid my exercise book open on the bed beside him. He wasn’t a big man, but it was tight with four of us in the room, and it was hard for me not to be in awe. A real RAF pilot, in uniform, *sitting on my bed!* I never thought I’d get *so close*.

But then, I never dreamed I’d have a German coding machine to share with him, either.

“I wonder how many of these there are in Britain,” Jamie said softly, running his fingertips lightly over the keys. “It must be jolly difficult getting them here. And jolly brave of the chap who brought it.”

“Yes,” I said, remembering the piano, the records, the gunshot in the van. Each bit had been awful, but it added up to bravery. “He was.”

"Did he tell you how to use it?" Jamie asked.

Ellen and I shared a look and then we joined in a high chorus of a laugh, remembering that night.

"He didn't tell us a thing," I said, when I got my breath back. "But he left instructions. They're in the German leaflets. When he knew I was watching, he dropped a hint about where he'd hidden them. We'd never have managed without the leaflets—the settings change every day."

Jamie frowned down at the puzzling English phrases in my jotter, narrowing his eyes at it.

"The bit about the half-moon makes sense," he said at last. "When the moon is dark, it's probably just as difficult for the Luftwaffe to find targets as it is for us. So this means something like 'Leave Shetland alone till the next half-moon.'" He pointed farther along my pencil jottings. "And here it looks like they're going to lay off Aberdeen while this other thing is going on. The city took a pounding in October. Those Roman numerals must mean a Junkers 88 bomber, a Ju-88. I wonder what their special detail from Lista to Deeside is."

"Where is Lista?" Ellen asked.

"Norway. Just about the closest point to Scotland—we think they're planning to build an aerodrome there, but it's not much more than some surveyors' stakes at the minute. We've taken pictures."

"We ought to warn Deeside," Ellen said. "Else A-Flight might run into trouble."

Jamie screwed up his mouth, staring at the machine. Suddenly he seemed less intimidating. He looked stubborn and baffled and not much older than me.

He nodded. "I'll warn them," he said. "But I'm not telling Cromwell. I'm damned if I'm going to hand this over to Cromwell! Not when we've got an edge on the Luftwaffe *at last*. I know him, he'll send the machine off to Coastal Command for fingerprint testing, or make us wait till he tries it himself, or refuse to let anyone else near it. He'll block us from using it because it's not in the rule books, *especially* if he thinks I have anything to do with it."

Ellen hesitated, and then blurted out, "But, Jamie-lad, what if it was sent for someone else to use, and not for 648 Squadron? That Robert Ethan, that Intelligence toff, he isn't anything to do with you. The Jerry who brought it was supposed to meet him specially."

Jamie narrowed his eyes again, thinking about it.

I shook my head. I didn't want to let the machine go, either. What Jamie had said—*Not when we've got an edge on the Luftwaffe* at last. Not when I was *finally* able to do something useful to fight back.

"Felix Baer left the settings for *me*," I said. "He said my name and looked straight at me, and stuck a key up in the bar like your airmen do with their sixpences. *For luck*, he said. In English. And he'd hidden a note in it."

"Aye, he did that," Ellen admitted.

I suppose it was odd Felix Baer would do that. Why had he chosen *me*? I wasn't even in uniform. Perhaps he guessed his contact would talk to me later, and I was the one who had seen the machine.

However, Robert Ethan hadn't asked about the machine, and I didn't find it till after he left.

Jamie reached out a fine, narrow finger and dialed back one of the rotors.

"You said the settings change every day," he said. "How many do we have?"

"We think until the end of January," I told him.

Jamie said forcefully, "So we have to use them *now*."

Ellen gave Jamie a long look, took a deep breath, and nodded in agreement.

"I'll have to spin a tale," Jamie said. "I mean, a tale about where we got this gen."

"Gen?" Jane asked. She hadn't said a word since he'd shaken hands with her, but she was leaning forward with her head cocked so she could hear everything, and I could tell she was just as excited as the rest of us.

"Information. Sorry." He grinned over at her with bright eyes, amber-green flecked with brown, like dried palm fronds with the sun behind them. "We all have our own mumbo-jumbo, and I don't get off base much."

Ellen chewed at her lower lip, watching him like she was worried about him. I didn't think they were sweethearts, but I knew they'd been friends for a long time, since before the war. She wanted to help him.

I had an idea.

I leaned forward and picked up my *L* key. It came off the

keyboard easily. Then I flipped to the back of my exercise book and found Felix Baer's strip of onionskin paper that had been rolled inside the key.

"November's almost finished anyway," I said. "If we just keep the November setting chart that has the instructions, I can copy out the December and January charts for us to use, and you can give the real ones to Intelligence. I bet they're what Robert Ethan was looking for anyway. You can pretend you found this key just now, in the bar downstairs with the other wishing coins, and that you found the leaflets where he hid them in the Django Reinhardt record album. And Jane can write this last message in German in the cover of one of the charts, as if the pilot left it there himself."

"And when I 'find' it, I'll have to pretend my German's better than it is. I'll see if I can borrow a dictionary off my wee sister." Jamie stood up. "Let me take your key and do some sleight of hand downstairs. You'd better make those copies now, so I can take the charts with me today. I've got to warn Deeside."

"Ellen can get them to you," I promised.

I didn't think I'd get my letter *L* back, once Wing Commander Talbot Cromwell got hold of it. But I passed it to Jamie.

"I'll see you again, ladies," Jamie said, giving a gallant little bow.

Then he and Ellen went back downstairs.

Jane and I were alone again, me and my eighty-two-year-old operatic registered-alien German companion, involved in a wonderful small conspiracy that was going to help win the war.

I set to work copying German code settings.

When I'd finished, I folded the exercise book and the copied charts over the keyboard of the coding machine and closed the lid. I put it back in the wardrobe, where it was safe enough hidden beneath Johanna von Arnim's old evening clothes. Now all we had to do was wait for Ellen to come back to collect the leaflets for Jamie.

"Why don't you play your flute for me again?" Jane suggested.

A different idea came to me all of a sudden.

"Couldn't you teach me Morse code?" I asked.

She turned over her upside-down teacup and lifted the teapot to pour herself some stewed, cold tea. She was surprisingly unfussy about her tea.

"What makes you think I can teach you Morse code?" she

asked.

"You were a telegraphist," I said. "And if I learned now, I could join the forces, perhaps, when I'm older. I only left school two months ago—I feel like I should still be learning things. And... it might be useful."

"It might be," Jane agreed.

I screwed the sections of my flute together.

"I thought I could learn it and practice at the same time," I said, and held the flute to my lips. I drew in a deep breath, as if I were about to dive into cold water. Then I held down my thumb and opposite pinkie and the first two fingers of my left hand and played an A.

"Oh, of course!" said Jane.

She sang an A.

"Tra-laaaa."

Dot-dash. Short-long.

I played another A, *tra-la*, quaver and crotchet, *tra-la, tra-la, tra-la*.

Jane's amazing near-contralto swooped up a step to a B. "*Traaaa-lalala.*"

I echoed her on the flute. AB, AB, *tra-lahh, tra-lalala, tra-lahh, tra-lalala*.

And on up the A-minor scale, getting quicker and surer all the time, until by G we were both breathless and had to stop because Jane started to mix up notes to test me, and I trilled them staccato back to her like sleet against window glass, and we laughed so hard we couldn't sing nor play.

And in one afternoon I learned almost a third of the alphabet in Morse code.

Phyllis wasn't in on it. We didn't dare tell her—she was under Cromwell's thumb. When Jamie had to give her his report after they blew up the U-boats, he used the Bell Rock Lighthouse being alight as an excuse for sweeping the area around it. I don't think he lied to her; I'm not sure anyone *could*. She talked to you like a primary school teacher, brisk and firm. She settled all of Ellen and Mrs. Campbell's arguments (over Ellen's ration coupons, Ellen smoking in the bedroom, Ellen propping her bicycle against the shed door instead of properly putting it inside, Ellen hanging her wet mackintosh in the bathroom). Phyllis stuck to the rulebook about

everything. The Isle of Man butter ruffled her feathers something terrible.

“Oh, no, Mrs. Campbell, don’t butter my toast this morning, *please*. I don’t want to know where it came from, and I shall have to report it if any more comes in!”

I didn’t think she really *would* report Mrs. Campbell for a pound of contraband butter; she was kind as kind. But she would have reported the Enigma machine.

So Ellen and I didn’t have much chance to talk about it, because she and Phyllis shared a bedroom, and there was almost always someone else about when I saw Ellen. I was hardly ever on my own.

I had Jane to look after. She couldn’t go far or fast, but she was determined to make the most of her freedom, and I was constantly panicking that she’d go off without me and get herself into some difficulty. When the gales cleared off, she decided we should take the bus to Stonehaven to visit the library there. We timed it so Ellen could give us a lift to the bus stop (with Phyllis in the van too, on her way to the aerodrome; there was no escaping her).

A thing happened on the bus that scared me and Jane both.

We got on and I paid our fares, and we went and sat just across from a young mum with a wobbly baby on her lap and a little boy next to her. Jane, I discovered, could not resist a baby.

“Hello, little man!” She leaned forward, around me, to see him. She covered her eyes and uncovered them quickly. “Peepo!”

The baby gave a gurgle of a laugh. His big brother, not yet old enough to be in school, stared.

“How old are your boys?” Jane asked in a friendly way.

“Bertie’s four, and wee Angus is just nine months old today,” said the woman.

The four-year-old Bertie wasn’t staring at Jane. He was staring at me, sitting right across the aisle from him.

Suddenly he buried his face in his mum’s arm, clinging and fearful. His shoulders shook as he started to sob.

His mum leaned down to listen to him, then looked up and laughed.

“No, don’t be a silly-willy!” she told the boy. “Of course she isn’t a German!”

Jane gasped and flinched. I heard and felt it. I’d only known her for a fortnight, but in that time we’d seen Liverpool bombed and had faced down an enemy soldier with a gun, and delivered the

code that sank three U-boats. I had never known her to be shaken by anything until this moment when she thought she'd been found out.

And she hadn't even done anything to give herself away; she'd just been caught off guard somehow by a small boy. She stiffened, and sat up straight so that my head blocked the people opposite from seeing her face, and her hands went tight where they were propped on the sticks that lay across our laps. I could feel the sticks pressing hard against the tops of my thighs as she pushed on them.

But I knew that the boy had been looking at me, not her.

He wouldn't raise his head. He muttered into his mum's arm.

"I shall ask her myself." She leaned over her little boy and spoke to me directly. "You're not from round about, are you? Where do you come from?"

Jane got it, then.

But she didn't relax; the sticks pressed down more fiercely into my legs.

"I grew up in Jamaica," I said. I could feel the blood rising to burn in my cheeks, the familiar anger and the unfamiliar urge to fly into a fight, the way I'd felt when that horrid Chip Wingate called me a darkie. "I'm British. My dad is—" I swallowed. "My dad was a seaman in the merchant navy, but his ship was torpedoed. Hardly anyone was rescued."

"Oh, darlin', how terrible!" The young mum's concern was warm and honest. "My husband too, last spring. Just after Angus came along, as well. He never saw the wee 'un." She bent her head so she could speak into the cowering boy's ear. "You see, Bertie? Her daddy's been lost at sea just like yours. She wouldnae speak English if she was a German!"

Jane flinched again.

The woman looked back up at me and gave an apologetic little laugh. "You must be the most northerly Jamaican in the kingdom! He's no' seen one before. Nor a German, for that matter. But he worries about Germans a great deal. Silly wee lad! There's no Germans here."

I was the most foreign-looking person that boy had ever seen, so he thought I must be German.

And here all the while was this German woman sitting stiffly afraid beside me and hoping no one would notice. For once, Jane hadn't spoken up for me.

I tried to smile—that poor young widow was being nice, after all. But I couldn't manage it. People being nice to you after someone has made you feel like a criminal or an enemy is just like sticking cardboard in your window after a bomb has blasted all the glass out of it. The hole is stopped up, but the glass is still smashed and you can't see through the window anymore. Everything in the room is uglier and darker.

Mummy would have poked fun at these people, helped me to laugh it off, swept up the invisible broken glass, painted pretty patterns on the cardboard in the hole. Alone, I was helpless with anger. I didn't want to live in the ugly dark room with the smashed window.

"I'm sorry about your husband," I murmured.

And that was that—nobody said anything else to one another throughout the whole eight-mile bus ride to Stonehaven.

But after we got off the bus, and Jane and I were by ourselves being scoured by the salt wind as we made our way very slowly down the High Street to the library, she asked me about my parents.

"Mummy was English," I told her. "She was born in London. Her father was in the Royal Navy, based in Jamaica, and directed a band for them. He died—both her parents died before she was married. But she was already grown up then, teaching music at a secondary school for boys in Kingston. I look like her, except that she was blond! We have the same face, same shape of eyes and mouth. I can wear all her clothes now—well, if I take them in a bit at the top."

It felt good to talk about her, I realized.

"She gave harp and piano lessons, and used to play at weddings and things like that. Sometimes I got to go along and sit in a corner gobbling wedding cake."

"How did she meet your father?" Jane asked.

"They both sang. They were in the same operatic society. He was a seaman, too, like her father, but..." My daddy, Lenford Adair, always bringing me presents from faraway places and shouting with laughter at my school stories. Arguing politics with our landladies in London in his sea-deep baritone voice. My very earliest memory is of him singing on the veranda, while I lay in my cot under the mosquito net in the dark warm night and lizards scratched on the screens and the window slats. *Come sit on my knee and sing, Carrie!*

he'd call softly to Mummy. *I've missed you, girl.*

"Daddy's mother, Granny Adair, lives on the tiniest farm on the edge of Kingston, and Daddy ran away to sea when he was fifteen. He was in the merchant navy. So my mother was alone with me a lot. And when I was in primary school there were labor strikes and workers rioting all over the Caribbean, and Daddy's ship stopped more often in Southampton than it did in Kingston, so Mummy came back to London with me in 1937. She was glad she did it, too, because the very next year there was a big strikers' riot in Kingston and people got killed."

And two years after *that*, the London bus she was riding on fell into a crater made by a German bomb and *she* got killed.

Suddenly I felt like I was going to choke on the unfairness of this stupid war. How did I get here, walking at a snail's pace down this windy cobbled street full of cold granite houses, carrying ration books and a forged passport for an ancient German opera singer, helping her find something to read while we waited for a winter evening bright enough to drop some bombs by moonlight?

"My father wasn't let in the Royal Navy because he wasn't born in Europe," I added. "He'd been a British seaman since he was *fifteen*, but that wasn't good enough for the Royal Navy. Even though he ended up dying like a navy man."

My voice was getting shrill.

It still made me furious, and I dreaded that the same thing would happen to me when—if—I tried to enlist. I thought about the little boy on the bus, who'd taken one look at me and decided I must be the enemy, just because he'd never seen anyone who looked like me before.

But there was the Enigma machine. If I never got another chance to serve, at least I had the Enigma machine now.

I hated the bitterness I'd heard in my own voice. I took a deep breath.

"Sorry," I said quietly. "I'm sorry. It didn't seem to make him angry—he volunteered and they said no. They told him he was doing vital work that needed doing, and that made sense to him. And he *was*. But it made *me* angry. It still makes me angry."

Jane didn't answer for a minute or so—just concentrated steadily on moving forward, tap-step-tap-step, with her feet and her sticks.

Then when we got to a corner where we had to cross the road,

she stopped to rest a moment and straightened up.

“You have all your life ahead of you. You will have to start fighting,” Jane said, as if it were a straightforward and practical plan for me: destroy the British Empire’s color bar and save the world from fascism at the same time.

“I envy you, a little, my dear,” she went on. “I’m doing it the other way round. I started out my life with all doors open to me, and the world’s events of the past ten years have held nothing but sorrows and disappointments as those doors, and more, slammed closed. My nation has poisoned itself. I will never go home. I will never belong anywhere again. I have no people.”

My heart gave an anxious little skip that was becoming familiar. “Oh, Jane,” I scolded her. “When the war ends—”

She cut me off. “If the war ends tomorrow, I will already be eighty-two years old! My future is rather more predictable than yours.”

She started tottering across the road.

“But you, girl,” she added to me over her shoulder, with the warmth coming back into her voice, “you might be able to change things.”

Ellen:

I was the courier now.

It made me nervous. I admit it, I was scared of Cromwell finding out. I hadn't crossed paths with him much, except to drive him to Deeside. But I knew how Jamie hated him, and that made it worth the risk. Anything, now that Jamie had a whiff of his old self back. Pimms were the heroes of the day after that last op. The lads said Jamie never got so much as a *Well done* out of Cromwell, but that was his own fault for striding in for debriefing and boasting, *Guess what happens when we're armed properly!*

I stopped at the airfield gate on my way out to Stonehaven to collect a crate of administrative bumf from the rail station, and waited for Nobby Fergusson to raise the barrier. He sidled up to the Tilly looking important.

I cranked down the window. "What now, Nobby?"

"Watch out for that bus stop when you get to the crossroads, Volunteer McEwen," he said. "We have reason to believe it's the center of a dangerous spy network."

My belly lurched. What had he seen? Had he noticed my back and forth carrying on between Jamie and Louisa? But I'd not gone at all out of my way!

Nobby's mate Jack Hinton put in, "I never liked that telephone box much, either."

"What are you lads gassing about?" I said through my teeth.

"Didn't they tell you at operations?" asked Nobby, pleased to be the bearer of bad news. "A German bomber flew over last night, dropped a load of TNT up on the main road, and scarpered off back to Norway. Flattened the bus shelter and knocked over the telephone kiosk!"

"They missed a very suspicious post box," Jack added with a wink. "It sits all by itself in a field wall. Perfect place to get rid of a secret message. Maybe the Jerries know something we don't know!"

"I'm sure they know all sorts you don't know," I told them as they raised the barrier.

That explosion hadn't even shaken me out of bed. Why would the Luftwaffe send one lonely bomber to an empty wet bus stop guarded by drookit sheep?

It put out the telephone line into Windyedge village for a day or so. But we still had the radios at the aerodrome, so 648 Squadron was all right.

In daylight, plain daylight, the Luftwaffe was back the next afternoon with three Junkers Ju-88 bombers. They went skriking past the Kingsleap Light and swung north along the cliffs. Pimms Section got scrambled out to chase them; Old Flash radioed Deeside to beg help from the Spitfires. And Wing Commander Talbot Cromwell leaped into the Tilly with me as his driver.

"McEwen, is it?" he growled. "Take me to the signal box just before the railway crosses the Clemency Bridge."

I didn't have a clue where that was.

"I'm sorry, sir," I said. "I've not been along the railway before."

"What the devil have you been doing these past six weeks? There's been no active squadron here since October. You could have been checking routes!"

"Petrol, sir." I swallowed. "I mean, I wasn't to waste petrol."

"You have a bicycle, don't you? Where's your initiative? *Christ*." He had a fight with a map and won. "There," he said, smacking the limp page as if he'd like to do the same to me. "Get moving—there's a farm track above the village that'll take us there."

It had long grass growing up the middle, being travelled only by tractors and horses, but that didn't stop Cromwell making me drive full skelter along the cliff tops.

The Ju-88s had cleared off back to Norway when we arrived. But Jamie was up there flying in circles round the smoking holes in the railway line. I knew Silver must be on his belly in the Blenheim's nose, giving directions, and Tex would be on the floor in the back with the escape hatch open, snapping pictures in the icy wind.

That was the first bomb damage ever I saw. I couldn't make full sense of it. Where the explosion happened, the track looked like sheep's wool snarled on a wire fence. Cromwell strode around the wreckage and I trailed along after him with my mouth hanging open.

"Hah! Unlucky fellows," he exclaimed at last, standing at the edge of the hole in the railway line. "Poor show for the Jerries!"

They missed the Clemency Bridge. This'll take a week to mend, I shouldn't wonder. But if they'd hit the bridge, the line might have been out for months. Where's my clipboard, Volunteer McEwen?"

Of course I didn't have his clipboard.

"Good God, you're inefficient, girl! Go get it out of the Hillman. I'll ask for anti-aircraft defenses to be installed on this stretch of the line. They won't surprise us here again."

Was it my fault he'd left his flipping clipboard in the Tilly? No wonder Jamie couldn't stand him.

It was dark when I was let go that evening. All day folk ran about like mad things, railway officials came and went, and RAF officials blethered and shouted at one another. Someone else took the Tilly away overnight, full of ironmongery, and I got sent home on my bicycle. Jamie dashed out as I was leaning over the front wheel to make sure the lamp was properly dimmed, as Phyllis had told me off more than once for riding home with a light showing, and I'd had enough telling off that day from Cromwell without Phyllis joining in. In any case after seeing that hole in the railway, I didn't want to let the Jerries know where I was.

"It's hard work catching you alone," Jamie said breathlessly. "Here—it's another German message. There's a sweet spot in the sky just east of Aberdeen where we seem to get signals straight from Norway. It's clearer at night, but we had an excuse for haring about this afternoon because of that raid. Wasn't it lucky! No one was hurt, and now we're onto the Jerries again! I say, Ellen, if Louisa works out this message, can you ask her to leave it somewhere I can collect it myself? She could hide it in the same record album, and pop a penny among the wishing coins to let me know it's there, and no one would notice. Just on the outside edge, where I put mine. I'll know to look for it."

"You and all your folk are a clan of lying, crooked schemers," I told him, straightening the front wheel of my bicycle. "And to think the McEwens get called sleekit, just for being Travellers!"

He laughed. "You're an angel. Listen, I've told Silver about this, so he could deliver the cipher machine key and the leaflets and tip-off message to Cromwell—it seemed easier to pretend Silver found it in the Limehouse bar than for me to get in another battle with the Old Roundhead. So Silver's safe if you need to pass anything on through him, but don't let Phyllis know what's going on. She's a

lovely lass, but Cromwell's got her in his pocket."

"I'd be mad," I said, warmed to the heart by his laughter and his hope.

I so wanted another win for him.

I shot off into the dark on my bicycle with his scrap of paper in my breast pocket.

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Louisa:

I *loved* the Enigma machine. It was such a *beautiful* thing, with its nickel-trimmed keyboard and polished wood case. Its steady lamps picked out letter after letter for me to transfer to my exercise book, and in the moment when the meaningless soup of code became German it always felt like a jolt of electricity was going through me. It was *magic*.

I made duplicates of the next translation, one to leave in the record album, and one to give Ellen, in case she got to Jamie first. The message was complicated: something about a U-boat surfacing for urgent repairs between Scotland and Denmark, asking the Luftwaffe to protect the maintenance ship that was going to meet them. The coordinates were all in Roman numerals, as the cipher machine didn't have numbers on it. I worked through the code three times to be sure I'd got it right.

I was more anxious about hiding my penny above the bar than I'd been about anything since meeting Jane on the Isle of Man. I thought Nan would less likely notice something new up there than something old missing, but it was a risk. I didn't want her to catch me. Was I breaking the law? I don't think so, I didn't think there were any laws about what I was doing, but if there were and I was, I couldn't imagine the consequences. I didn't want *anyone* to catch me.

"Rules are made to be broken," I whispered aloud as I folded the copied messages.

We didn't use the thick paper from my exercise book to leave the message on. We didn't want anyone but Jamie noticing it behind the notes in the Django Reinhardt record. Jane cut a thin strip from a page of one of her own books, a beautiful edition of a fat novel called *Ulysses*, itself hidden in a paper dust jacket off a French/English dictionary.

"Why is your book in disguise?"

"They never would have let me take it to Rushen Camp if they knew what it was," said Jane smugly. She could be quite smug for

an old woman. “Quite the filthiest piece of writing ever published. It would upset Nancy more than an enemy cipher machine if she found a copy of it under her roof!”

A racy book disguised as a stern old dictionary—it rather reminded me of Jane herself.

I wrote out Jamie’s message in English. Jane guessed a little about how the German coordinates worked and added a note for David Silvermont at the end. I added a warning on the back about keeping our new communications system secret—as if they needed to be told that!

I waited nervously until the middle of the night to hide it. I lay awake listening to the wind in the Scotch pines on the ridge above the house. Jane wasn’t worried—her relaxed, gentle snore began almost as soon as I put out the light.

When the luminous dial of Mummy’s little Bakelite alarm clock showed it was after midnight, I climbed out over the foot of the bed. It was freezing. I didn’t put on my dressing gown or slippers, though. Cold would keep me alert, and I still had enough of the Jamaica bush in me to feel more confident in bare feet.

“Louisa?” Jane whispered.

I’d woken her getting out of bed.

“I’ll only be five minutes!”

I felt my way across the room and through the door, and padded down the passage. My jumping stomach made me incredibly sneaky.

I switched on the light in the loo that Jane and I shared with Ellen and Phyllis, and closed the door. Then I crept on down the passage. If anyone heard me and saw the light around the edges of the door, she would think I was using the toilet.

The cold stairs felt good against my soles. I kept to one side, holding the banister, feeling the smooth wooden treads beneath my feet at the edge of the woven coconut matting. By the time I reached the bottom, my heart was hammering as it had never done when the bombs were falling around me in the Blitz.

No one’s on guard, I told myself. Nobody’s down there.

There wasn’t any light. I didn’t want to switch one on. I felt my way across the cold flagstones, found the poker, and stirred up last night’s fire. Old embers glowed red beneath the banked ash, and gave me the little bit of light I needed.

I climbed up to sit on the bar to reach the ceiling instead of

standing on a chair. Ellen had told me where to put my penny.

Then, quiet as could be, I crossed the room and slipped the message into the record that I'd left on top of the pile so I wouldn't have to hunt for it in the dark.

Afterward, I crept upstairs, opened the door to the loo, and pulled the chain to flush. Then I switched out the light and went back to Room Number Five.

Jane was asleep again—her magical power, able to sleep under any circumstances. There wasn't a stutter in her even, purring snore as I climbed into bed beside her.

Of course I had to do it all again a few days later.

I was just as nervous sneaking around in the dark the second and third time I did it. But I learned which floorboards creaked, which stair rail rattled, how to stick to the wall so I didn't bump into furniture. The nerves didn't go away, but I got better at my job. I wondered if that was how the airmen felt about flying into battle.

The next message wasn't much use—and half of it was missing.

REPEAT SPECIAL APPROACH STORM FRONT IV XII
FIRST GREEN LIGHT BEFORE HALF MOON

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Jamie:

Another German submarine! Coastal Command sent us on a not-too-risky mission to blast holes in Lista, the Luftwaffe aerodrome that didn't exist yet, as retaliation for the railway attack and to create a headache for the Nazi planners. We wouldn't have spotted that disabled U-boat if we hadn't known it was there, but it *wasn't even out of our way*. I let Adam Stedman in Madeira do the honors of sinking it. I didn't want to make Pimms look greedy... or to push our luck.

But our luck held, even though the incomplete message Louisa deciphered next wasn't as straightforward.

I tossed and turned on my narrow top bunk for three hours instead of sleeping, wondering what it meant.

*REPEAT SPECIAL APPROACH STORM FRONT IV XII
FIRST GREEN LIGHT BEFORE HALF MOON*

St. Nicholas Day, 6 December, would be the half-moon. Christmas was coming; IV XII came before that, 4 December 1940. ... And already it was past midnight on 2 December. The fourth was the day after tomorrow. What storm front was approaching on the fourth?

"Blimey, Jamie, give it a rest," Silver hissed from the mattress below. "When you turn over you shake the whole bunk."

"Sorry." I lay on my back like a block. Every inch of me felt uncomfortable.

"What's eating you?"

"Are we due some bad weather?" I asked. Silver always kept an eye on the MET conditions.

"Just the usual overcast and wind," he told me. "Do you want an excuse to stay on the ground? 'Lack of moral fiber, Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart!'"

I snorted. "Now? As if!"

"As a matter of fact it's going to be quite nice for a few days, which will give the ATA a chance to deliver those new Blenheims—

well, old ones without holes. New for us.” Silver’s voice dropped to a whisper. He asked almost inaudibly, “What’s really eating you?”

I leaned over the edge of the bed so my head hung closer to his, and he leaned on his elbows so his head was closer to mine, and we carried on whispering.

“I can’t figure out the last message.”

“Maybe we need to pass it to a real codebreaker,” Silver suggested.

“Yes, I thought of that, but then we’d have to tell Cromwell. Even if we went straight to Intelligence he’d find out.”

“He’ll find out eventually,” Silver warned. “The lads are wondering what’s going on. Sooner or later you’ll run out of excuses for the good luck.”

“If we don’t run out of rotor settings first,” I pointed out.

“It’s the Lucky-Rotor Aero Race!”

I choked on laughter, smothering my face in my mattress for a moment.

“How long are the settings good for?” Silver hissed. “Two months?”

“How long is a Blenheim crew good for?” I whispered back.

He didn’t answer.

“Should I tell Cromwell?” I asked.

“No,” Silver said. “The lads need this as much as you do. It would be nice to make it to 1941.”

Silver was right about the weather—we had two glorious days of low sun. It was the beginning of December, but it felt like spring. When our new planes turned up and we tested them over the moors on low-level flight maneuvers, I half expected to see lambs and daffodils below us. Ellen went about without her mackintosh, whistling. The whole of B-Flight, Windyedge’s ground crew, and the visiting ATA ferry pilots who’d delivered the fresh Blenheims all piled into the Limehouse on the evening of the third. The pub was so full that people spilled outside, as if it were summer.

I didn’t see the old woman and the young girl, but I heard Louisa’s flute and Jane’s singing. They must have stayed in their room because it was so crowded downstairs; you couldn’t get to the bar, and the lads passed their pint glasses back over one another’s heads. But Louisa and Jane had their window open to the mild night, and outside you could hear them working through the *Oxford*

Book of Carols, getting ready for Christmas. Every now and then the flute stuttered for a bit, as if Louisa were warming her fingers.

"Wow, I've got a headache," Chip complained the next morning as we lined up to shave. "Too much flute tootling over at Nancy's place."

"The *flute music* gave you a headache?" Silver scoffed in disbelief. "Yanks must be lightweights! Are you sure it wasn't the beer?"

"I'm not a Yankee," Chip growled. "I'm from Texas. You're the navigator—check a map! What do y'all think of a darkie learning Morse code, anyway?"

"Can you be more polite, and more specific?" I asked.

"The hired girl at Nan's. She was practicing the Morse alphabet all evening."

"What are you talking about?" Silver grumbled, muffled by foam and looking at himself in the mirror, not at Chip.

"She was tooting it on her flute. Took me back to when I was learning—it's not easy, you know, until you've got an ear for it. And once you know it's Morse you can't *stop* listening, so that's all I heard all evening—those durned ABCs up and down the scale, whistling up a storm!"

Silver laughed. "Well, a flute's a wind instrument," he said.

"There's no need to whistle up a wind *here*." I laughed, too. "It's always windy. They don't call it Windyedge for nothing."

I bent over the basin to rinse my face. I'd only heard music, Louisa playing scales—but all Chip had heard was the letters she'd been rapping out. How differently you understand things when you start from a different place, I thought, the way my heart gave a jump of relief last night when I saw the Kingsleap Light flashing green as we walked back to the airfield. I was always so relieved to spot it in the air at the end of a hop, and it took me a second before I realized it didn't matter because I was already on the ground, and it was lit for the fishing trawlers and not for me.

Something clicked in my head.

Whistling up a storm—a wind instrument.

*REPEAT SPECIAL APPROACH STORM FRONT IV XII
FIRST GREEN LIGHT BEFORE HALF MOON*

Green light.

They don't call it Windyedge for nothing.

A different starting point.

The fragments came together, and their meaning clicked into place. There wasn't any "storm front." It was a translation error.

It wasn't Jane Warner's error—we checked, later. "Storm front" was how the German wireless operator understood "windy edge."

They were going to attack Windyedge on 4 December—in the dark, while the green light was lit. They must already be most of the way here.

"Silver, back me up," I hissed.

I tossed aside my razor, wiped my face on my vest, and yelled, "*B-Flight! Pay attention!*"

Everyone stared.

I didn't have proof, and if I was wrong I'd probably be court-martialed. But I couldn't risk losing a whole fleet of freshly mended Blenheims to a Luftwaffe bombing raid.

"Ablutions postponed," I told them. "Drop everything and get out to the hangar. We need every single one of 648 Squadron's planes in the air *now*."

"What, in my pants?"

"I'm cleaning my teeth!"

"Before breakfast?"

Harry Morrow, who was younger than me, said, "Wake up, Scotty—you're still dreaming!"

"Or thinks he's still lord of the manor," sneered Bill Yorke, who was ten years older, *damn him*.

"Or maybe I'm following orders," I snarled, "as *you're* meant to."

Everyone else had protested or complained. But Bill Yorke was stirring up mutiny.

This time they didn't just stare: they held their breath. I don't think they were hoping for a fight, exactly; just wondering what would happen next.

Silver shrugged. "A drill's a drill," he told Harry, ignoring Bill Yorke. "Get used to it."

"*In my pants?*" Dougie Kerr repeated incredulously, and everyone laughed.

The tension eased. Once again, Silver had given me the edge I needed.

"A timed drill," I improvised. "No warning, *as if we're under*

attack. We have ten minutes to get in the air for a rendezvous off Aberdeen. The past week's been wizard for B-Flight, don't bugger it up now; let's show the Old Roundhead what we can do. Kerr, get your trousers on! Tex, do a head count. We need every plane in the air, the trainer as well; we'll take the shot-up Blenheims and let the ferry pilots fly the ones they brought. Stedman, you're mostly dressed, you go get them moving. Silver, you come with me and raise the ground crew."

I knew I wouldn't have any trouble with the ground crew—they pre-dated Cromwell.

Silver and I met each other's eyes.

He moved his lips soundlessly. *Not a drill?*

I shook my head.

"I'm with you," Silver said aloud.

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Louisa:

We were still in bed that morning, 4 December, when we heard the Blenheims taking off.

I sat up and counted and got to ten.

“That doesn’t make the least sense!” I exclaimed. “I thought there were only six aeroplanes in B-Flight.”

“Perhaps they keep spares,” said Jane.

We heard footsteps running in the passage, and the bathroom and toilet doors slamming. Phyllis and Ellen had both leaped into action.

“The planes took off in the *dark!*” I said. “The moon went down hours ago—I thought they couldn’t fly without a moon!”

Jane squinted at my luminous alarm clock.

“I think they struggle to find targets without a moon. But they can fly, and it will get light in half an hour or so,” she said. “It’s a quarter past eight. You and I are slugabeds. Perhaps they’ve been posted elsewhere.”

Ellen and Phyllis clattered downstairs and the front door banged.

Jane went back to sleep.

I don’t know how she *could*, except that she had the gift of instant sleep. I couldn’t even make myself lie down again.

Five minutes later I recognized the *whomp-whomp* of German engines, like the bombers flying over London.

I catapulted out of bed and hauled the blackout curtains from the window facing southeast over the sea. The Kingsleap Light bloomed bright green in the dark, flashing as the lamp swung round. There must be British fishing boats about, or the lighthouse would be dark. I leaped across to the narrow north window that faced the airfield, but I couldn’t see anything there. The terrible throbbing German engines were louder now—they sounded like they were right overhead.

Then the fins whistled as the bombs fell.

I couldn’t see the airfield, but WOW did I see the explosions.

"Jane, Jane!" I screeched. "The aerodrome's being bombed—come look!" The need to look was fiercer in me than the sensible need to dive for cover. If something was going to blow me up, I wanted to see it coming.

Or perhaps, like Jane, I just didn't want to miss anything. She was as silly as me about the fireworks. We crowded for the view at the narrow window.

"My word, that is a direct hit—something is on fire!" Jane exclaimed.

We heard distant sirens. We couldn't see anything on the ground, only oily black smoke lit by the red glow of flames. A thick column rose in the sky, showing the German pilots exactly where to aim on their next pass.

They came back. We couldn't tell if they hit anything the second time. Then the Royal Air Force came roaring in to chase them off—not our Blenheims, but a swarm of Spitfires from Deeside. It was like watching the Battle of Britain all over again. I thought I'd never grow tired of it: the soaring dots against a bottle-blue predawn sky, the whine and roar of engines, the twisting loops of vapor trails as it started to get light—and in my stomach a knot of painful envy because I was not up there too, doing something useful, able to fight back.

It didn't last five minutes before the Luftwaffe planes turned tail. They didn't have a fighter escort to protect them.

"Hitler is a madman," Jane pronounced. "What a waste of fuel and effort, bombing an empty aerodrome! I suppose it is a miracle those boys managed to get all their planes off the ground before the bombs fell. Somebody must have seen the storm coming—"

"*Seen the storm coming!*" I cried. "*Storm front! Windyedge!*"

Jane grabbed my arm.

"Jamie got *all the planes* out in time," I breathed.

"I hope the girls are all right," said Jane.

Jane and I spent the afternoon by the peat fire in the public bar feeling nervous, while Nancy Campbell sullenly served and washed up after the villagers. She glanced at the wishing coins every now and then, muttering under her breath, as if she were praying to them. The Blenheims didn't come back.

Of course the aerodrome telephone was knocked out again, and they couldn't spare anyone to bring us news, so we had to wait. We

played records on Jane's gramophone to count off the time. It took ten hours and twenty minutes to get to the bottom of the record pile, she said, but we'd only played three hours' worth (not counting while the pub was open) when the front door slammed in the vestibule.

Mrs. Campbell practically fell over herself with anxiety. She threw open the wooden gate and leaped from behind the bar. "*Phyllis? Ellen?*"

It was Ellen on her own. She stood in the doorway.

"I won't come through just now," she called across the room hoarsely. "I'm all over soot. I had to help with the firefighting, and then I had to drive to Aberdeen and back twice."

She was not joking—soot covered her from head to toe. Her eyes were red and swollen, and her hand on the doorknob was covered with blisters.

I gasped. "Oh, Ellen, your poor hands!"

Mrs. Campbell looked her up and down and said grudgingly, "I'll light the boiler for the hot water before six p.m., just this once. Mind you don't fill the bath beyond the five-inch mark. There's a war on."

"Aye, Nan Campbell, I might have some idea about there being a war on," Ellen rasped.

Mrs. Campbell dared to ask, "Where's Phyllis?"

"She's still at the aerodrome, filling out forms. We lost a big supply of tinned food, and she's trying to order more. She's all right. *Everyone's* all right. The Jerries missed the operations hut. But the hangar is burnt to the ground." Ellen sucked in a deep breath, and coughed. "The lads are all right, too, Mrs. C. They had to land at Deeside, because the surface at Windyedge is all over holes. Cromwell was there last night, so I had to collect him and bring him here to look at the damage, and then I had to take him back to Deeside again."

Nan Campbell clutched the brass counter of the bar and gasped with relief. She gave a quick glance at the wishing coins.

"The ground crew's filling in the holes, but we won't be able to bring the Blenheims back till next week at least." Ellen coughed again. "Phyllis will want a bath, too, when she gets here."

"Och, no bother, I'll light the boiler now and you get yourself cleaned up," Nan said. "And when you go back to the airfield, tell the lads working there that if they get hungry they can come here."

I'll see if Morag can put in extra time behind the bar."

Morag Torrie was the timid village girl who helped Mrs. Campbell when it was busy.

"Ta for the hot water," Ellen said, and turned around to stalk upstairs.

"Take her a cup of tea, will you, Louisa?" Mrs. Campbell uttered. "Oh, and there's some Germolene in the kitchen on the shelf above the sink. For the burns."

It was as close as I had seen her come to anything like sympathy.

Ellen:

It took me a long time to get my uniform off, for my hands were so sore. Cromwell already had a go at me for wearing mittens knitted by one of my cousins, instead of my gauntlets, which would have protected them. *No one to blame but yourself, McEwen*. But how was I supposed to drive in those bloody great things? Like wearing Wellington boots on your hands.

When I was quaking with chill in my underthings I realized the water in the boiler wouldn't be warm for another wee while. I'd been dreaming of that bath for the past half a day, I must have been going soft, living under a roof with hot water out of a tap!

I hung up my clothes on the back of the bathroom door and wrapped myself in the shawl that Nan disliked because it wasn't a proper dressing gown. I ran cold water in the basin while I waited for the hot, pulling the stool up so I could sit and soak my hands.

A tap came at the door.

"Ellen? Shall I leave this outside?"

That was Louisa with a tea tray.

"Come along through," I said, and she edged through the door. "All right, Louisa?"

"I'm all right." She gave me a smile and jerked her chin at my hands. "What about you?"

"Aye, no bother. Ta very much for the tea, just set it on the floor there."

"Mrs. Campbell sent you up some burn ointment, too," Louisa said.

"Och, she didn't! She's got a soft heart under that hard shell, hasn't she? Like an old pearl mussel stuck on a stone in a river bed." A corner of the shawl was trailing in the basin and getting a good soak too. I sighed, and watched Louisa put down the tray and stand up again.

She didn't leave, though.

I gave a jerk of my own chin toward the bathtub, telling her to stay. She sat down on the edge, dark eyes eager, waiting for my

news.

I wiggled my sore fingers, splashing water about in the basin. If Nan had a fit of kindness and decided to bring me some sticking plasters as an afterthought, I didn't want her to hear about our amateur codebreaking.

"Is the old woman behaving herself?" I asked. "Mrs. Warner—do you like working for her?"

"I love it," Louisa said, and I saw that what she meant was that she loved *Jane*. But she wore a worried frown as she said it.

"Is it difficult?"

"It's the easiest work in the world. I do up her buttons and help with her stockings, and keep our room tidy. And I play my flute or piano duets with her, and we listen to records or the radio, and I read novels out loud. She's always interested and lets me read what I like. And with Mrs. Campbell giving me room and board, I can save most of what she pays me. *But—*"

"But there's bombs," I said.

Louisa shook her head. "That's not it. There were more bombs in London. It's that I worry about *Jane*. She leaves the gas tap on without lighting the fire. She tries to go out on her own and she says it's because she doesn't want to wake me, but the cobbles are always black with ice first thing in the morning and you know how steep the lane is past the limekilns. If she falls or gets hurt or... or worse... well, even if it isn't my fault, the more I like her, the more I couldn't ever forgive myself if something happened and I wasn't there to help."

She looked away. She gave a quick sniff, then turned about again.

"She's teaching me Morse code!" Louisa said shakily, as if she wanted to talk of something else. "She could teach me to sing opera. I bet she'd teach me *German* if I really wanted to learn something useful."

I stared at her. "*Useful! German!*"

"I want to do something to help with the war. I could translate for prisoners, perhaps, when I'm older. I don't know. Be a spy, like Mata Hari." Louisa frowned again. "Your poor hands! Do you need help?"

It was most unlikely anyone was listening.

But Louisa rabbiting on about bloody Mata Hari and learning to speak in Morse code like a Jerry made me not want to take any

chances.

"I don't need help. I'm going to have a bath." I stood up, shook my wet hands, and turned on the bath taps. The water roared, covering the sound of our voices beyond the bathroom door.

"I had a word with our Jamie, over at Aberdeen," I told her. "He worked out that message this morning, and ordered the planes away from Windyedge. In the dark—most of the lads took off in their vests and braces! Must have been *perishing* up there without flight suits."

"But what did he tell the commander?" Louisa asked, wide-eyed. "Where did he say he got the tip?"

"He put it back to the first message—remember, that one about 'Deeside south green light'? Jamie worked out it means *us*. We're south of Deeside, just off the green light at the Kingsleap Rocks. They tried to hit us in daylight last week and got the railway by accident, but when the light was lit for the fishing boats this morning, they tried again. They'd have surely got most of our planes on the ground if it hadn't been for Jamie. Even Old Cromwell saw that. And what do you think he said?"

I pulled Cromwellian eyebrows and put on my best posh English accent. "Good thinking, Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart, but insubordination nonetheless. You didn't ask permission. Confined to barracks for a week except for operational flying."

"Poor Jamie!" Louisa exclaimed.

"Bloody Cromwell," I muttered.

The water was nearly to the five-inch line Nan had painted in the bathtub. I'd have to turn off the taps in a moment. I spoke in a rush.

"Old Cromwell thinks the Luftwaffe is using Windyedge for bombing practice," I told Louisa. "It's the shortest hop from Norway to Scotland. But you and I know there's a Jerry coding machine hidden in the wardrobe down the passage. And I think some Jerry knows it, too—not the one who brought it, but someone else, someone who doesn't want it here. And they're trying to destroy it. They'll keep at it until they think they've hit it, and as long as we keep using it they'll know they haven't got it."

That angry little frown split Louisa's forehead again.

"No, that isn't at all sensible," she said. "The machine could be anywhere. We could have taken it to London by now, or Wales, and still be using it to decode messages for Windyedge. Perhaps they're

trying to punish us because Felix Baer landed here.”

The bath was five inches deep.

“Or perhaps,” she added, “they’re trying to destroy the airfield so he can’t come back.”

We couldn’t talk any longer because I had to turn off the taps.

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Jamie:

B-Flight flew out of Deeside along with A-Flight, on fishing-fleet and battleship escort duties for the whole December moon, getting in the way of the Spitfire fighter squadron based there. Meanwhile the holes in the runway at Windyedge were mended, and a new hangar got thrown up next to the crater where the old one used to be.

ABERDEEN SECTOR CLEAR START XII UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

Normally I'd have had my heart in my mouth worrying that we might run into Messerschmitt 110 night fighters on these ops. That message in Louisa's notebook reassured me. Aberdeen had been bombed pretty fiercely right through October; now the Luftwaffe seemed to be holding back.

Phyllis came to Deeside with us, but I only saw Ellen twice while we were there, taking Cromwell on some inspection errand. The second time I didn't even get to talk to her. She just gave me a look and shook her head ever so slightly.

I shrugged in reply, and went off whistling, to let her know everything was all right.

Actually, everything was *fine*.

I'd wanted an edge over the Germans and now that I had one, I felt like our luck had changed. Finding that coding machine, getting unexpected tip-offs that helped us sink four U-boats, saving all our planes from being turned into scrap metal on the ground when the aerodrome was bombed—being one step ahead of the enemy for a week or two—made us *lucky*.

We hadn't lost a man since 7 November. That was six weeks ago, and that was a record for 648 Squadron. It is true that one night on warship escort with A-Flight we got caught in the crossfire of a naval battle. One of my propellers was blown away by anti-aircraft fire from a German battleship, and they also smashed Dougie Kerr's gun turret. But the Royal Navy took care of the

German battleship, and although it was no fun limping home on one prop, I managed to land upright. Dougie, whose head stuck up in the shattered turret of the Aussies' plane, came home with a bloody ear—he'd been clipped by a shard of flying Perspex. Not by a bullet. He'd ducked out of the way just in time.

Lucky!

The mechanics got to work on my plane and we were back in the air two nights later. The turret was harder to fix than the propeller, but a ferry pilot brought in another new Blenheim and took the old one away. Dougie walked around with a plaster over his left ear for a few days.

Six weeks and nobody even had an *injury*, apart from my lucky bullet on the Bell Rock Light run, and Dougie's lucky clip on the ear. Dougie's grazed ear didn't qualify for a wound stripe any more than my grazed leg did, but in Aberdeen we all chipped in and bought him a gold hoop earring like a pirate.

Windyedge was ready for B-Flight to come back just in time for Christmas.

The moon was old on Christmas Eve when we walked to Nancy's place from the airfield, crunching ice in half-frozen puddles, howling our way through "Deck the Halls." Nobody knew all of it, so there was a lot of fa-la-la-la-ing. The sixpences we'd left there the night before the aerodrome was bombed were waiting in the oak beam above the bar. And that Django Reinhardt album was waiting also, waiting for me to leave Louisa another mysterious message, so she and Mrs. Warner could magically translate German code into sensible King's English.

The war turned Christmas into hard work—London, Manchester, and Liverpool were pummeled by the Luftwaffe bombers. The food rationing seemed endless; we were told to buy war bonds as presents. But Louisa looped paper chains made of old issues of *The Scotsman* from the ceiling of the Limehouse, and heaped pine branches twined with ivy over the mantel, and wound ivy around the tree trunk posts holding up the bar. There was a candle in a jam jar on every window ledge, even though you couldn't see them from outside because of the blackout curtains.

As we came marching in, Louisa started to pound out "Deck the Halls" on the piano, picking up our song, and Mrs. Warner's wonderful old contralto pulled our *fa-la-las* into line.

Between carols, I dragged over a chair next to Louisa's piano

stool.

“There’s a sort of unofficial *no bombs* ban over Christmas,” I told her. “Both sides do it. But of course Old Cromwell’s being a Scrooge about making us fly on Christmas Day, since the ships don’t get a holiday either, and we thought we’d have some fun behind his back. We’re going to take Ellen and Phyllis along for the ride. What about it, Louisa?”

She turned to me, staring.

“To the airfield? In the Tilly?”

I laughed. “No, in a Bristol Blenheim,” I said. “Out over the North Sea during the Christmas truce.”

Very softly and slowly, she played the opening bars of “Joy to the World.”

Then she stopped. She glanced at me, biting her lower lip, and croaked, “Yes, please.”

She was so eager it made her look like she was about ten years old. I laughed again.

“You’ll get a ride in the Tilly as well, come to think of it, if Ellen brings you over tomorrow morning,” I said. “Wear extra socks. Wool. Three pairs at least. It gets colder the higher you get.”

Louisa:

The sun on Christmas morning rose shining through clouds, bright red as a cherry-flavored boiled sweet, a poinsettia in full bloom, a glowing punch bowl of holiday sorrel. I leaned into the window and pulled back the blackout curtains and thought, I will be *up there with it* today!

Jane was excited because I was excited. She came downstairs to see me off, wearing a beautiful short silver fox-fur cape. Mrs. Campbell was slamming things around behind the bar. She couldn't keep public hours until the twenty-seventh of December, and fretted about not being able to work.

Phyllis scolded, "Think of those young men in the air on Christmas Day! They're not complaining."

"Why are you in and out the kitchen if you're not working?" Ellen provoked Nan.

"I've to fix Christmas dinner for you girls, haven't I?" Mrs. Campbell grumbled. "You'll be hungry when you're back from your flight. Morag's mother, Mrs. Torrie, has sent a bit of venison."

Most of Mrs. Campbell's meals involved tinned beef, cabbage, and turnips, so a morsel of fresh meat would be a proper treat.

Jane took off her cape, bundled it into a fluffy roll, and piled it on top of the counter.

"Happy Christmas, Nancy," she said. "I thought you might like to have a fur, as I've little reason now to wear them all."

Nan Campbell went as pink as when 648 Squadron were chanting her name the day they got there.

"Why—" She spent so much of her life grizzling that she struggled when she was pleased. "Why, Aunt Jane. That is—That is —" She looked at the lovely soft thing as if she expected it to come back to life as a dozen foxes and bite her to death. "I couldn't!" She put out a hand as if she were going to push it away, and instead she patted it.

Then there was no going back.

"Well, if you're not wearing it, as you say," she conceded.

“Thank you, Aunt Jane.”

Jane had given me one of her fur coats, too. I was stunned. I’d saved enough of my small salary to buy her a record album, as I hardly ever spent money on anything except the gas meter. I’d bought it in Stonehaven when I went by myself to return the library books: William Walton’s Viola Concerto. I thought Jane might like some new English classical music. I was very glad I had something nice to give her.

Ellen gave me and Phyllis each a silver sixpence, because we were going flying with 648 Squadron.

With a dramatic flourish she pushed a silver coin of her own into the beam above the bar.

“Go on. You do yours now, Louisa.”

My heart seemed to turn somersaults. The ceiling was low enough I could touch the beam with my fingertips, but I wasn’t tall enough to force the sixpence into a crack.

I couldn’t climb on the counter with Nan watching.

I dragged a chair to the edge of the bar to stand on. I could see Jamie’s sixpence, waiting for my penny to turn up beside it the next time another decoded instruction was ready for him. I didn’t want to draw Nan’s eyes over there.

I pushed my sixpence into a crack in the old wood right at the other end of the beam. I’d easily remember where it was—exactly opposite Jamie’s.

My fluttering heart soared, plummeted in terror, and leaped into my throat.

Rules are made to be broken, Lula, Mummy’s cheerful voice reminded me in my head.

If I died that afternoon it would be worth it to ride in an RAF Bristol Blenheim bomber.

I touched my sixpence with the tip of my finger. *Keep me safe.*

Jamie:

I found myself whistling “The Wassail Song.” It was not regulation for Pimms Section to take three girls along on our Christmas mission, and Phyllis was so nervous it was hard not to tease her.

“No worries, this isn’t a bombing run, we’re just on patrol,” I told her cheerfully. Oh, it was like being in school, if school had included aeroplanes! It gave me the same feeling of truant joy, the heady satisfaction of undermining authority just for fun.

The ground crew helped the girls into flight suits, pleased as punch to be pulling a fast one on Wing Commander Cromwell.

“Helmets, good—don’t worry about masks, they won’t need mikes and we’ll stay low enough they won’t need oxygen,” I told the fitter who was equipping us. “Can you get three more Mae Wests? Extra gauntlets and as many Ever-Hot bags as you can find! Don’t tell ops.”

“As if I would! Whose head is on the block when someone twigs, anyway?”

“Mine, mine, always mine,” I assured him. “Nobody’s fighting today. There won’t be a bit of trouble. It will all be *wizard*.”

In flight suits and life vests, the lasses walked to the waiting planes without attracting attention. Madeira Section had already taken off, and the Old Flash had promised to make sure Cromwell didn’t go near the hangars or the radio room. Phyllis and Ellen and Louisa stayed close together, a complicated collection of nerves.

Phyllis wasn’t afraid of flying—she was just terrible at breaking rules, and she dithered with anxiety. “Oh dear—oh dear, I shouldn’t be doing this. It’s so important I set a good example—”

I knew Ellen was scared. I’d taken her up before, and she hadn’t liked it. But she wouldn’t admit it. She steeled herself by looking angry and bored, and kept close to Louisa, the baby of the gang.

“Who do you want to fly with?” I heard Ellen whisper to her. “Phyllis is going with the Aussies. You can choose.”

Louisa was the only one of the three who was visibly *sparkling* with excitement.

“You go with Jamie. He’s your friend,” she said decisively. “I’ll go with Ignacy and Derfel.”

“All right, Ignacy and Derfel are safe as houses, but look out for that Yorkie,” Ellen told her. “He’s pinched my bum five times since they got back from Deeside, once a day, regular. If he does it again I might have to thump him in the teeth.”

Bloody Bill Yorke.

Nothing I could do about it now; he wouldn’t be able to bother Louisa from the rear cabin.

But I made a note to keep a close eye on him back on the ground.

I wasn’t going to let him ruin my day, nor anyone else’s.

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Louisa:

The only plane I'd been close to was Felix Baer's Messerschmitt 109. Now I was going to climb inside a Bristol Blenheim bomber. With an engine mounted in each wing and the glass turret riding on its back for the gunner, it seemed gigantic. Its tail rested on a tiny wheel against the ground, and its nose pointed at the sky as if the silly tail wheel embarrassed it and it couldn't wait to take off.

Jamie hustled me onto the wing of Ignacy's plane, giving me a river of instructions.

"Walk up the wing along this rough bit; you won't slip. Sit on your parachute just in front of Taff's feet—you're only wee, you'll fit. Once we're in the air you can hop onto the observer's seat in front of him and you'll have a super view out the nose. Don't worry about Yorkie, I know what Ellen's been telling you, but he's stuck in the rear cabin minding the radio and the rear gun. Mazur and Taff are a sound pair—they'll take care of you. You won't be able to hear much, or talk to anyone, so thumbs-up for everything bang on, and thumbs-down if you need to be sick! Here you are—pop your foot into my hands and I'll boost you up. Climb in through the hatch—"

Squatting on the broad wing next to me, he locked gloved fingers together.

"Warm enough? All buttoned up? Mae West tight? Righto, we're off to the North Sea—just wait till you see the Scottish Highlands from the air!"

The front cabin of the Blenheim didn't feel gigantic, though. With three of us squeezed in together, it was like being a bit of saltfish in a tin. Ignacy and Derfel chattered to each other in Polish and Welsh as they checked the flight instruments. I wondered if they were doing it on purpose to wind up their new gunner. Or me—they must be used to Bill Yorke by now.

I thought of Phyllis squeezed in with tall Harry Morrow, the Aussie flying the third Pimms plane with his knees around his ears, and Gavin Hamilton, who still looked like he wasn't old enough to

shave. I thought of Ellen squeezed in with easygoing, handsome David Silvermont and Flight Lieutenant Jamie Beaufort-Stuart. For a moment I felt a stab of envy.

But if I'd gone with Jamie and Silver, I'd have to go with Chip Wingate, the American from Texas.

My pilot, Ignacy, waved to get my attention.

"All right, little one?"

I gave him a thumbs-up. He grinned. "Engine start!" he yelled to the ground crew.

One propeller began to turn, then the other. Within seconds they were both alive and it became wildly, deafeningly loud in the cockpit.

Through the clear panes in the canopy overhead, I saw clouds rushing by as we gained speed for the takeoff. Then the tail of the plane lifted and I could see trees and moorland ahead of us. Finally, the way a ripe mango suddenly comes unstuck from its stem, we just lifted away from the ground. I could *feel* we were aloft.

I was in the sky.

Ignacy pushed levers and turned knobs, holding the control yoke lightly with one hand. He waved at me again, gesturing *Up, up!* He pointed into the Blenheim's nose. *Get up and look!*

I crawled forward to a swiveling stool in the nose of the plane. There were wide, clear Perspex panels in the front. I crouched on the metal seat in a cocoon of glass, and I could see *everything* as we took off to the west, into the wind.

Jamie was right about the super view. The Highlands were magical ahead of us. We were still lower than their snow-covered heights, white and pink and gold in the elusive winter sun like a glittering Christmas card. We flew over the moors where the main road passed on its way to Aberdeen. Beneath my feet was a herd of red deer, dozens of them, leaping away as we skimmed overhead.

I hadn't realized how beautiful it would be. I forgot it was dangerous.

Derfel tapped me on the shoulder and beckoned. When I crawled back to him, he offered me his own leather helmet so I could hear the radio.

"Hallo, Louisa!" came Ellen's voice in my head, crackling over the static. "Happy Christmas!"

Only Ignacy had a microphone that connected to Jamie's plane, so I couldn't answer her. All I could do was beam. It was smashing.

Ignacy's voice spoke clearly in my ear.

"You want to fly?"

He lifted his hand from the controls, and to my surprise the plane flew steadily on.

"The Blenheim flies herself," he told me. "Here, try, you will do it—"

He let me crouch next to him and hold the controls. He coaxed me to tilt the wings, following Jamie ahead of us.

Ellen:

Jamie had one extra leather helmet with a headset in it, and I was the lucky lass who got to wear it.

"All right?" he asked.

"Braw!" I said. I'd been up with him once before and never showed him how it frightened me the first time, and I wasn't going to now, either.

"Stand up and take a look out the back!"

"Stand up? Are you daft?"

"Maybe, but look at Ignacy waving to us!"

I was too tall to stand all the way straight, but I put my head up in the clear canopy for about three seconds, holding hard to Jamie's seat back and Silver's shoulder. I could see Ignacy's Blenheim flying behind us away off to our left, with the Aussies lined up on our right. The wings of Ignacy's plane were rocking gently up and down.

After a moment Jamie dipped our own wings to wave back, and I tumbled over into Silver's lap.

"Jamie Stuart, you raging gumpus!"

Then Silver and I laughed so hard untangling ourselves that I feared it would make Jamie crash the plane.

But of course he did no such thing, and with the rest of Pimms Section close behind us, we all veered round together to head out over the North Sea.

Louisa:

Ignacy waved me away from the controls so he could turn, and Derfel plucked his helmet off my head and put it back on his own. I saw him talking. But over the roar of the Blenheim's twin engines I couldn't hear a thing he and Ignacy said.

They seemed tense and focused now.

I crawled to the observer's seat to stay out of their way. Then through the panel in the clear nose of the plane, I saw why they were paying attention. We'd reached the navy ships we were looking for. From the air they seemed tiny, fragile things, black water bugs in an absolutely endless world of gray.

For a moment I thought, *It could be Daddy!*

Then I remembered it couldn't.

Not on a navy ship.

Nor on a merchant navy ship anymore, either.

Oh, Daddy. How did I get here? I wondered again. *How did I get here?*

My pilot and navigator now seemed to forget I was there at all. That frightened me a little. I wondered if this was how they felt all the time they were flying: a little bit scared.

We followed Jamie's plane into the gray sky of fitful sun, and the other Pimms Section plane followed us. Somewhere ahead of us, I knew, Madeira Section was also on patrol. *Safety in numbers.*

We were faster than the ships below us, so we swooped around and back, sweeping the skies for enemy planes, who might have guns even if there was an agreement not to use them today.

Who made that agreement? How did they let each other know? A radio message? In code? In German? In English?

It was *impossible* not to feel uneasy.

Ellen:

"Aw, fer cryin' out loud," said Chip in the back. "The Luftwaffe is out here on Christmas Day after all. I can hear 'em jabbering away in Kraut. Tune in and listen, Cap'n, they're not on the same frequency as us—"

Jamie twirled the dials, and then I heard it too, crackling in and out: men's voices barking orders in a tongue I could not understand.

I had a queer sense of the sky full of invisible young lads ready

for a fight.

Jamie and Silver felt it too. They were pulling worried faces at each other. It made my mouth go dry.

I swallowed and licked my lips. "What's up, Jamie Stuart?" I challenged him.

"Ah, well, lassie," Jamie said in a low voice, "I might not have brought you along if I'd known there was going to be a surprise party. I suppose that's the nature of a surprise party, actually."

Louisa:

Ignacy and Derfel burst out laughing.

Derfel handed me his flight helmet. We'd picked up the Luftwaffe radio signal too. They were probably patrolling their own shipping, like us. I couldn't hear much—mostly crackling static.

But now and then came a man's voice, singing in German.

It was a Christmas carol. I listened and listened.

Jamie:

"Bloody Jerries," said Silver.

They were singing "O Tannenbaum."

"You hear that, Pimms Leader?" called Ignacy.

"It's the Christmas truce of 1940!" I exclaimed. "But wasn't it 'Silent Night' the Jerries sang with our lads in the trenches in the last lot?"

I gave the Germans a taste of their own medicine. "*Stille nacht, heilige nacht*—"

There was deafening stillness.

Then, in a burst of defiance, the German voice shouted: "*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, über alles in der Welt!*"

All of B-Flight heard it.

"That's no Christmas truce, that's the Nazi national anthem!" yelled Harry Morrow. "Can we go get 'em?"

Bloody hell, I thought, not with the girls on board, you young tosser.

“We don’t know where they are,” I said. “Let ’em sing.”

Louisa:

We didn’t see any German planes.

But we heard the singing, off and on, the whole time we flew over the battleships. Derfel kept passing me his headset so I could listen.

We circled the ships for two hours, until Jamie said we’d passed the English border with Scotland. After that, another RAF squadron from farther south came flying up to meet us. Everybody waved their wings at each other in a friendly way and shouted *Happy Christmas* over the radio. Then that lot took over our job and we could go home.

We’d passed the Firth of Forth and the Firth of Tay and were heading up the Angus Coast toward Stonehaven when we met the Luftwaffe bomber.

It was a Junkers 88, a Ju-88—I recognized it as German the moment I saw it. To me it looked like the perfect match for the Blenheims we were flying, twin engines just like ours and about the same size, except the wingtips were squarely tapered instead of rounded like ours. It was flying low along the sea cliffs, scouting, an ominous black shadow below us against the winter sea.

Ellen:

I haven’t Louisa’s eye for German planes. But I worked it out quick enough, because when Silver pointed, bloody Jamie stood the Blenheim practically on its wingtip in a turn that made my stomach tumble the wildcat. I held on to my porridge, and I got an eyeful of the Jerry bomber out the side of the canopy, with one of our own Blenheims diving after him.

Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart suddenly pushed the nose of his Blenheim forward, too, and we swooped in a swan dive toward the planes below us.

Jamie:

Those young Australian blockheads were going after that Ju-88 *with Phyllis on board*. I could see the tracers flaming from Harry Morrow's guns.

I dived after him. I couldn't *stop* Morrow, not once a fight started. But I had to be there if he needed me.

Ellen:

God help me, I prayed.

I sat on the floor with my eyes squeezed shut and teeth grating and my hands clutching the hard, cold edge of the seat on either side of me. I knew that if I came up alive without being sick it would be a flipping miracle.

"All right, lass?" came bloody Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart's voice in my head. Through the headset, I mean.

I winked an eye open to take a keek at my pilot. He was frowning. He was *listening*.

I squeezed my eyes closed again. But my ears were open. And then I heard it, too. Someone in the German plane was whistling.

Ignacy's Polish voice spoke into my open ears. "The musical Jerries are out today," he said. "This fellow knows the classics."

Jamie:

I may have a classical education but I don't have a musical one, and I didn't recognize the mournful tune over the crackling static.

Silver did. He agreed with Ignacy. "That's Mendelssohn's *Hebrides Overture*. The tune's all right, but his rhythm is off."

Louisa:

"Oh!" I cried. "Don't shoot! *Tell Jamie not to shoot!*"

Ignacy glanced at me, startled. He couldn't hear me over the deafening engines.

I scrambled up beside him and peeled the leather helmet away from the side of his head so I could scream in his ear.

"It's Odysseus. *Odysseus! Tell Jamie not to shoot!*"

Ignacy's voice came calmly into my ears through the microphone in his mask.

"Tell him yourself. Don't yell like that."

I could see the Pimms planes below us on the German bomber's tail.

The mournful whistle, only two bars, shrilled in my ears, then cut out as Ignacy held down a button on a handheld microphone that he raised to my mouth.

Ellen:

And the next thing I heard made me let out in a gasp of surprise the long breath I was trying to hold.

"Jamie, Jamie, it's me, Louisa! Don't shoot that plane! It's what the German courier played, Odysseus, you know who I mean! It's a message—it's an SOS—"

Then Jamie's voice, answering her. He said one word only.

"Mendelssohn?"

And finally Tex's drawl came in from the back, and he agreed with Louisa.

"It's literally an SOS," Tex said. "That Kraut is whistling SOS in Morse code."

Jamie:

"*BREAK, MORROW,*" I yelled at Harry, still firing his guns below me. "*BREAK, YOU TOSSER, HOLD YOUR FIRE.*"

Louisa:

The silhouettes of the Blenheim and the Junkers 88 below us suddenly separated, curving in different directions, like a stalk of sugarcane split down the middle.

The German plane headed out to sea. The British planes made long, lazy curves up through the sky to join us, one after the other.

I gasped with relief, then was torn with doubt.

SOS?

That doesn't mean *Don't shoot*. It means *Send help*.

The plane was a distant speck heading east toward Norway, and the whistling pilot wasn't getting any help.

Jamie:

Ignacy was outraged. I'm pretty sure the only thing that stopped him going after that Ju-88 himself was Louisa sitting next to him.

"What the hell, Scotty?"

The German bomber was an ink splodge on the horizon.

"Mendelssohn's banned in Germany," I told him. "And it's bloody 'Pimms Leader' to you."

"What the hell, Pimms Leader?"

"We're supposed to be holding fire anyway, and I'm not shooting down a dissenter on Christmas Day."

"That is not what I meant by what the hell!"

"Well, what did you mean, then?"

"What is all this nonsense about Odysseus and a German courier?" Ignacy asked me.

The whole of B-Flight had heard us. All six of my flight crews had heard—eighteen men. Well, seventeen, not counting myself.

Phyllis might have heard. And even if she hadn't, she was in the same plane as Dougie Kerr, who couldn't keep his mouth shut for five minutes. I'd have to collar her the second we were back at RAF Windyedge—but dammit, then she'd interrogate every one of us in debriefing. Someone was bound to sing.

Ellen, I could trust Ellen to deal with Phyllis. But I'd have to warn her before we landed—

"I'll tell you on the ground," I said, trying to shut up Ignacy—and everybody else. *"Careless talk costs lives."*

Louisa:

When we landed at RAF Windyedge, Ignacy climbed out first, so he could help me get through the hatch and onto the wing. Derfel came behind, guiding me.

I'd completely forgotten about Bill Yorke. He'd been in the back with the radio and the rear gun the whole time, not saying anything—or not saying anything I could hear, at any rate. He had his own hatch to climb out of and was waiting for me when my feet landed on the ground. He threw a careless arm over my shoulders.

I hadn't felt sick in the air. I'd been so worked up with excitement and awe and fear—I'd been wondering at the beauty of the sky and panicking at the possibility of being part of an air battle, and astonished that Felix Baer might be near me again in another German plane, and I had not devoted a moment to my stomach. But back on earth I suddenly felt sick.

I swallowed and swallowed, shrinking under the heavy arm of the strange gunner.

"Where did you learn German code names, then?" Bill Yorke asked casually. "Do we have a little Colonial spy in our midst?"

Ellen:

I had my own wee mission now—one desperate chance to catch Phyllis as she got out of the plane, before she was able to talk to the lads. The second my feet were on the ground I sprinted for Harry Morrow's Blenheim, just pulling up behind us.

I had to pause for a moment because I couldn't keep down the oatmeal any longer. But then I kept on running.

Louisa:

What that gunner said to me felt like a bomb going off in my head, and when Ellen stumbled and was sick, I lost everything too.

Jamie:

Yorkie leaped away from Louisa in horror, checking down his front to make sure she'd missed him.

I grabbed him by the wrist and shoulder of his leather jacket and shook him until I hoped his teeth were rattling in his hard head.

"*Stow it, Yorke, you don't know what's going on because you're not supposed to! Are you going to accuse me of spying, too, for calling off the attack? And Tex, for recognizing an SOS? Also, keep your mucky hands off the lasses.*"

Yorkie staggered back against the Blenheim's wing, trying to decide whether it was worth going for me. Ignacy and Derfel watched with intense interest—who'd win this time?

"I get that a jumped-up flyboy doesn't want to tell a lowly air gunner what's going on," Yorkie snarled. "But I don't get why the hired girl knows."

Louisa was bent over on the grass beside the rear fuselage of the plane, the back of one hand up over her mouth. Silver dodged around us to kneel beside her with his handkerchief.

"Because she was here when the German agent dropped off the code strings we're using," Silver said, looking up at us. "The Windyedge-based ground crew was all here too. Only they've been told to shut up about it, *so they do.*"

Code strings! It sounded deadly important in its magnificent vagueness.

Oh God, Silver was the *best mate* a body could have. *The best.*

I took a step back so Yorkie couldn't use his height against me. "Flying Officer Yorke, I said I'd brief everyone on the ground, and I will," I said coldly. "But call your commanding officer a 'jumped-up flyboy' again and I'll see to it you're docked a month's pay."

The lads all knew that wasn't an empty threat.

"Understood." Yorkie straightened his collar and tie. Almost as an afterthought, he dropped me a contemptuous "*Sir.*"

Then he stormed off toward the operations hut.

"You handled that as well as could be expected," Silver said, grinning.

CALYPSO

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Jamie:

Felix Baer. That was the German pilot's name.

He brought the Enigma machine to Windyedge. He flew the plane we *didn't* find when we tangled with the Messerschmitt 109 in November; I'd imagined him as a lost wingman, but he turned out to be a resistance agent who somehow eluded the fighter chasing him.

Can you hear me?

I hear nothing.

Was it also Felix Baer whistling an SOS in the Junkers 88 we let go on Christmas Day?

I wondered about him. I wondered what he'd risked to get that cipher machine over here.

I wondered if he guessed we were using it.

As our intelligence officer, Phyllis surely already knew a bit about "Odysseus's" visit to Windyedge. Ellen softened her up between the Blenheims and the operations hut, confessing how the rogue German pilot held her hostage; how he spent the night at the Limehouse going through Mrs. Warner's record albums; how Louisa recognized the whistled tune during our North Sea Christmas party, the same music he played on the piano in the pub that night.

Incredibly, when we got to debriefing, Phyllis was as prim and neat in her uniform as if she'd never been off the ground.

"It feels terribly odd to ask you to tell me in the usual way what happened up there, when I saw it all myself," she said apologetically. "But what happened up there?"

B-Flight lined up on their folding chairs, except Dougie Kerr, who was still hovering hopefully over the tea trolley as if he expected more shortbread to magically appear.

Hiding in plain sight seemed safest. I'm a quick liar, but not always a consistent one. I wanted to tell everyone the same story, and keep it simple, so I took on Phyllis and B-Flight at the same time.

“We weren’t ever going to be heroes during a Christmas Day cease-fire,” I answered Phyllis. “But there was a good reason not to go after that Luftwaffe bomber today.”

I turned around, leaning over the back of my chair, to include Pimms and Madeira.

“A German resistance team left Windyedge a list of upcoming U-boat maneuvers last November—that’s why we’ve had such good hunting this month. We know where a few of them are going to turn up. That whistler on board the Ju-88 is probably the man who left the tip-off.”

There was a murmur of comprehension as B-Flight fit this with what they already knew.

“So you lads keep quiet about what you heard today and don’t second-guess the next mission, fair enough? We’re *privileged* to have this information, thanks to a brave man from the other side. We’re on our way to being aces.”

They straightened in their seats.

Beside me, Silver fiddled with his box of rosin, grinning down at it.

I didn’t have to mention the coding machine.

I wondered how many others like it there were in Britain, and how I’d explain myself when I finally had to confess I had this one. I didn’t wonder about it *much*, though, just the way I didn’t wonder whether I’d still be alive in the spring. Nobody in a Blenheim aircrew wondered about such distant futures. The next singalong in the pub was as far as we got.

I knew our Enigma honeymoon was temporary. At the end of January we would have used up the rotor-dial settings Felix Baer had left behind. And if the Germans suddenly changed the rotor sequence at random, we’d be stuck. Intelligence would have to figure out how to get anything else out of the machine. Until then I had the most wonderful secret weapon in the world, and I didn’t have a plan for what would happen to it when I couldn’t use it anymore.

That’s perhaps not an easy thing for anyone else to understand. But you couldn’t fly if you thought about being alive next spring.

We were bombed after Christmas and again in the first week of January. “It’s the Windyedge Blitz!” said the villagers in the pub, pleased to get attention that usually went to Aberdeen. One attack

hit moorland, sending sheep and red deer running in terror, turning heather to confetti. The second attack blew up the three-hundred-year-old breakwater at the bottom of the cliffs in Windyedge village. No one was hurt, and it didn't make the national news.

The Germans used the Kingsleap Light for navigation. So did we. The lighthouse keeper was told to step up security and keep it dark unless he got a special release code from Cromwell himself.

JU LXXXVIII AND CX ESCORT DEESIDE S GREEN LIGHT XIV I

That was straightforward once you translated the Roman numerals: a Junkers bomber and Me-110 night fighters navigating via Kingsleap on 14 January 1941. We didn't take on the Me-110s, which would have made mincemeat of us. Silver pretended he'd spotted them in the air—just about plausible, coming from Silver, with his night vision under a full moon. He hadn't seen a thing, but Chip sent a warning home anyway. Cromwell called the fighters from Deeside to go after them and they never got near the coast.

U-BOAT MANEUVERS FRASERBURGH N XVIII I

That was a gift—like our Bell Rock adventure.

By the end of January, Madeira Section had sunk two submarines and Pimms was at four—one more, or a battleship, and I reckoned we in Pimms could call ourselves aces.

And when it happened at last we'd go to the Limehouse to celebrate, and Louisa would be at the piano, and Mrs. Warner would choose records, and we'd sing and toast one another as if we'd never been in the sky three hours earlier with dry mouths and cold hands, dicing with death.

HOLD GREEN LIGHT AWAIT FOG PREVENT HAPPY WAGON AND SO ON

What in blazes did that mean?
Happy wagon?

Pimms Section raced Madeira home beneath the February moon, beating up the German Navy halfway to Norway. We were out of settings for the cipher machine, but the last January messages we'd picked up were just beginning to play out. This was a fairly

ordinary op and hadn't been mentioned in the code—we dropped a lot of high explosive on a lot of German ships—a Madeira flight crew actually hit one. The ones we didn't hit fired a lot of anti-aircraft guns back at us. We didn't hang about after our bombs were gone. It was a long flight, and the navigation was hard work—Chip didn't dare transmit for bearings because we were so close to Norway, so Silver had to stare at the stars. We were knackered by the time we made it safely back to Windyedge.

Wonderful to see the green glow of the Kingsleap Light guiding us in. I touched down ahead of the other planes, braked, adjusted the power, and turned to taxi back to the hangar. The weird Enigma message was still nagging at me.

PREVENT HAPPY WAGON AND SO ON

I wondered if it was another translation error, like *storm front* and *Windyedge*. What was *happy* in German? Dratted classical education—all I could think of was Latin.

In Latin, of course, it is *felix*.

I thumped one fist against the cockpit window, spluttering with the discovery, steering with my feet on the rudder pedals.

But if *felix* was the Latin translation of “happy,” what did *wagon* mean? The Latin translation of bear was *ursa*—*baer* in German. Like Ursa Major, the Great Bear? The stars we'd been staring at all night? A fragment of *The Odyssey* came back to me: *the Bear, surnamed the Wain...*

Of course. The Great Bear. The Wain. If you know what a wain is.

It's a wagon, of course, and “the Wagon” is what the Germans call the Great Bear.

PREVENT HAPPY WAGON

Wherever Felix Baer was now, the Nazis were onto him.

By mid-morning, when the order came to scramble back into our planes, we were every one of us dead asleep in our bunks.

The Pimms aircraft had been refueled and rearmed. That meant we were the ones who got told to hop to it.

When I'd whipped us up to get the Blenheims out of the firing

line the first time Windyedge came under attack, I'd been in my underwear. This time when I leaped out of bed to answer the telephone call from operations, at least I was in my pajamas. I pulled on trousers and boots over top and tripped over Silver pulling on *his* boots as I turned to haul the blankets off the slumbering Australians.

"What's going on?" Chip asked, throwing off his own blankets.

"One Ju-88 on its way to Windyedge," I panted. "All by itself. A fishing boat spotted it and then Coastal Defense picked it up on their screens. They're scrambling some Spitfires from Deeside, but it's coming from the southeast, so we might get there first. Get moving, Pimms!"

High in the pearl-gray sky, with Scotland a smudge on the horizon behind us, we reached the lonely German bomber before the Spitfires. Ignacy and I went in first.

"Looks like they have a hit already," Ignacy said. "It is trailing smoke—"

"That's a banner," came Chip's voice. "Tied to their tail. Wonder what they're advertisin'!"

The Junkers had white sheets over its Luftwaffe and Nazi markings. There wasn't a banner, but a piece of loose webbing was trailing out behind the aircraft like a thin streamer of smoke.

Instead of shooting at us as we swooped toward them, their pilot flashed his lights and wagged his wings like billy-o.

"Hold your fire, Mazur," I told Ignacy. "This fellow's trying to surrender."

I heard the Polish pilot's groan of disappointment.

"Oh, Scotty. Excuse me, I mean Pimms Leader—not this again!"

"Flashing lights and a white flag," I said. "You're absolutely forbidden to shoot at him. Don't worry, it'll still be jolly good fun, we'll bring him home with us! Anyone ever performed a formal interception?"

Of course no one had. I struggled to remember the international air law I'd learned in ground school.

We wagged our wings and flashed our lights back at the Jerries. Then we turned to slot into place around them, and nobody fired a shot.

"Ah, Pimms is magnificent," Silver murmured. "If only the Old Roundhead could see us in action. He'd be *proud*."

"He'd give us a bollocking because nobody knows the rules for an interception," I said.

Ignacy and Harry lined up on either side of the German plane, and I pulled ahead to lead it in.

"Keep an eye on that Junkers, Tex, would you?" I called to Chip, in the gun turret. "It's making my skin crawl not being able to see what they're up to behind me."

"I've got both my eyes on it," Chip said. "If those Krauts try anything they're going to get a faceful."

At that point three Spitfires from Deeside found us, which made a grand total of six RAF aircraft escorting one solitary Junkers 88, so I felt a bit more secure.

We flew home the way we'd come, lining up over the Kingsleap Light.

I would have to land first. According to international protocol, the surrendering Luftwaffe bomber was supposed to follow me. The other Pimms planes would come in behind us, and the Spits probably wouldn't land at Windyedge at all, but hare off home to Deeside.

The Luftwaffe pilot followed me like a lamb to the end of the runway. I knew he was there, but I couldn't see him. Suddenly Chip yelled from the rear turret, "He's making a run for it! No, he's *diving* —"

"He will hit the cliffs!" Ignacy yelled from behind the Luftwaffe plane, cutting off Chip's voice.

While these dramatics were unfolding, I clenched my jaw and focused on the runway. I was too close to the ground to do anything tricky.

"He straightened up, he's okay—" Chip let me know. "He's lining up behind you again."

Our undercarriage touched the earth and we bumped along the field. I braked, ready to get out of the way as quickly as possible so the planes behind me could land. Then Chip gave a wordless howl of terror, and all the sky in the clear canopy above my head was blotted out. I looked up and saw nothing but the hideous belly of the Junkers 88, *inches* away from my face.

If it landed on top of us we were dead.

Louisa:

Jane was good at keeping busy, but goodness, she hated being cooped up. Sometimes she decided she needed air at ten o'clock at night, and then we would spend a few hair-raising minutes feeling our way in the dark along the steep cobbles to the limekilns and back. Or just after dawn we'd stagger down the hill together to the harbor to watch the sun climb over the sea cliffs. We both longed to walk on the tiny beach, but it was full of the ruins of the exploded breakwater, not to mention mines and barbed wire and "dragons' teeth" concrete blocks meant to keep out German landing craft.

So Jane jumped at the chance of an outing to choose her own library books and treat me to tea and buns in a café on the Stonehaven seafront. On that day in the first full week of February, Ellen had to go to the railway station to pick up a courier who was delivering new maps that needed a proper guardian on their journey to RAF Windyedge. The Tilly would be empty going to the station and again going home after Ellen took the courier back in the afternoon, so she gave Jane and me a lift. We sat three across the front as usual with me in the middle, and as we drove we sang something we all knew the words to because we heard it on the radio just about every day—the Joe Loss Orchestra's "Spitfire Song."

We were on the way home and turning off the main road by the rubble of the bus shelter when black dots began to dance on the horizon.

"Is 648 Squadron in the air?" asked Jane.

She saw them too. Not bugs; not birds. Aeroplanes.

"They were out last night," said Ellen. "They should be tucked up in bed."

Four aeroplanes, about the same size, and three smaller ones above them. Ah, three fighters flying in formation, *beautiful*—my heart gave a leap as I tried to work out what they were.

"Whew, they're low," Ellen added. "They must be on a drill."

"Blenheims?" asked Jane.

"Aye, those big ones," said Ellen. "But the others—"

"*Spitfires!*" I crowed. The thrill of recognizing those neat tapered wings never wore off. I sang, "*The Deeside planes are here...*" and Jane reprised "The Spitfire Song" and we laughed.

"Are they training with them?" Ellen wondered aloud. "Or—"

She slowed the Tilly to a stop, right in the middle of the road, so we could watch.

The planes seemed to grow larger as they descended, and we watched as the first, one of the Blenheims, touched down at RAF Windyedge.

But the big second one, the odd one in the middle, flew so low over the landing Blenheim that we all gasped in horror.

For a moment we thought one plane would land on top of the other.

"God pity us, they'll be *killed!*" Ellen cried.

Then the one on top began to climb into the sky again.

The first stayed on the ground. All the rest, two Blenheims and three Spitfire fighters, followed the odd plane back up into the sky.

They roared toward us, black, throbbing machines growing swiftly larger, like genies coming out of bottles or balloons inflating. It was *just* like the day we arrived, only with more planes.

And the one that had nearly collided with the first was German.

I recognized its silhouette as it passed overhead. I'd seen a plane like it once before, black against a steel-gray sea instead of a dove-gray sky. It was a Junkers 88.

"They're chasing a Luftwaffe bomber," I gasped. "*648 Squadron's chasing a Luftwaffe bomber!*"

One of the anti-aircraft batteries on the perimeter wall let out a drumroll of machine-gun fire as the Junkers passed it. But the guns stopped almost instantly—the Blenheims and Spitfires were too close to the Junkers to risk firing at it. Six planes rushed past in a deafening roar of engines and black shadow. In perfect unison, like a music hall act, Jane and Ellen and I craned our necks and whipped our heads around to watch the planes soar onward and upward. I got a flashing glimpse of a sinister black swastika painted on the tail of the German bomber, and something like white smoke flying from the tail and the cabin. Then the closed back of the Tilly hid everything.

Ellen reached behind her seat to grab a pair of field glasses, cranked down her window, and stuck half her body out, sitting on

the window ledge and looking up.

“Is it our musical pilot come back again?” suggested Jane.

Again my heart turned over. Perhaps Felix Baer was bringing us a new set of code charts. I leaned on the dashboard, trying to see what was going on.

“How do I know?” said Ellen, staring at the sky through the glasses. “Och, they’re coming round again.”

She slid back abruptly into the driver’s seat, shoved the Tilly into gear, and started it up.

She drove too quickly. A freezing wind howled through her open window, and I braced myself against the dashboard. Jane, beside me, clung to the window crank and the door handle. We rounded the bend in the lane, and instead of carrying on ahead into the village to drop off Jane and me at the Limehouse, Ellen swerved into the drive of RAF Windyedge.

I held my breath. Ellen screeched to a stop in front of the barrier at the guards’ hut and waved.

One of the soldiers began to lift the barrier. The other came over to the van and glanced at the pass that Ellen held out. Then he stooped to peer in at her passengers—Jane and me.

“You have got to be joking,” he said.

“Oh, you know Louisa, Nobby,” Ellen exclaimed in irritation. “And this is Mrs. Campbell’s old auntie, haven’t you met her yet? She’s been living at the Limehouse since November!”

Jane gazed out the window at the planes, which had finished a single loop out to sea and were now heading back to the airfield.

“I haven’t the time now to drop these ladies off!” Ellen exclaimed. “ID, Louisa?”

I dug in my schoolbag. Jane beat me to it, and did the magic trick with her dead husband’s passport.

“Highly irregular,” grumbled Nobby. “You know that—”

But the other guard had already raised the gate. Ellen cut off Nobby’s protest by rolling up her window. The Tilly sailed past the barrier, spraying through icy puddles.

Ahead of us, the planes were roaring in for another go. One of the Blenheims had flown ahead of the Ju-88 to lead it. Another came behind the Luftwaffe plane, escorting it, and the Spitfires stayed above the others, guarding the Blenheims. Ellen guided the Tilly off the driveway and over the longer grass to the mowed runway’s edge, where she threw open her door and leaped out to

watch. I leaned out the open door behind her; Jane leaned over my shoulder.

The leading aircraft touched the ground and taxied out of the way.

“That’s Ignacy,” Ellen said. “It’s Pimms Section in the air—most of ’em. Jamie must have been the first to land....”

The Luftwaffe bomber was coming in now, its wings rocking, its nose rising and dipping. It looked very unstable. Harry Morrow in the Blenheim behind it came down as calm and steady as anything. Something was wrong with the German plane, or with its pilot.

Meanwhile poor Jane was struggling to open the door on her side of the van.

“How does one release oneself from a utility vehicle?” she demanded.

I couldn’t reach across her. I slid out past the steering wheel and ran around to haul open the passenger door from the outside. Jane lowered herself to the ground without waiting for me to help, letting gravity undo all the work it took to get her in there in the first place. But she needed my shoulder and an arm around her waist to help her stand, because her sticks were in the back of the van.

Now the third plane came down. The Spitfires circled above us, and the German plane taxied toward us from the far end of the runway, following Ignacy, growing closer. Airmen and ground crew were milling about everywhere, and Flight Lieutenant Jamie Beaufort-Stuart suddenly split away from the crowd and came over to where we were. He wore a life jacket and boots over what looked like a pajama top and uniform trousers, but he didn’t have on any other flight gear, and his fair hair was standing straight on end as if he’d grabbed it all by the roots and pulled.

“What’s going on?” Ellen called to him. “Was that you flying the lead plane?”

“D’you think I’d be out here in my jammies for fun?”

Ellen shrugged. “*You just might.*”

He ran one hand up over his face and through his hair, and I could see exactly how he’d got it to stick up in spikes. Then he waved at the German plane, which had trundled a lot closer. What I’d thought was smoke turned out to be a white towel or pillow slip fluttering from the cockpit window up front. Another long white streamer trailed behind the plane.

The Junkers was nearly twice as big as I'd thought it was in the air. It towered over the Blenheims. Its huge propellers clattered to a stop, and the white banners fell limp. The other planes switched off at the same time, and the stillness rang in my ears as if I'd gone deaf.

Then Ellen exclaimed in concern: "Jamie!"

She reached into the breast pocket of her uniform for her Woodbines and a matchbook and gave Jamie a cigarette. He took it, but when she offered him the matches he shook his head, put the cigarette in his mouth, and held up his narrow hands briefly, to show her.

He was trembling so much he couldn't light a match. It was awful. I sucked in my breath between my teeth.

Ellen lit one for him. He leaned over her hand to dip the cigarette into the flame. She was taller than he was, but it didn't make him look like a schoolboy. He looked like a bent old man.

"Sorry." He drew in a deep breath. "That landing gave me the screaming abdabs. Apparently these chaps—"

He waved the cigarette at the Luftwaffe aircraft.

"They came over from Norway this morning. I don't think they have enough fuel to get back. They seem to be unarmed—they want to surrender. Or to negotiate. See the white flag?"

Jamie took another long drag on the cigarette. "I don't know what happened. Maybe they had a change of plan at the last second, or something—the pilot seemed to lose control completely. The plane just went berserk. I suppose the loose webbing might have tangled in the tail—"

He pulled in a long breath of air that had nothing to do with smoking, and said, "I thought he was going to land on top of us."

"So did we," Ellen said soberly.

Jamie looked down at his shaking hands. "And I guess this is what it feels like when you actually do lose your nerve! Thank God it didn't happen in the air."

A section of the clear dome over the Junkers 88 cockpit slid open, and a hurricane of angry German shouts tore through the air. Jane, who always favored her left ear over her right a little bit, stood listening with her head cocked to one side like a bird watching a worm.

Suddenly a man catapulted out of the plane as if he'd been shot from a cannon. He tried to catch himself on the way down, missed,

and sprawled beneath the wing on the tawny winter grass. He was wearing a flight suit and leather jacket and helmet, which I couldn't have told apart from any of our British gear. A moment later another man climbed out after him.

The first scrambled to his feet and leaped at the other, pulling him to the ground. They rolled over and over beneath the wing of their plane, wrestling and throwing lightning-fast punches at each other. Then a third airman climbed out and joined the pileup.

By now there was a big crowd watching. It was nothing like a secret operation—nothing like last November. Young men in hastily buttoned uniform jackets piled in to try to separate the fighting Luftwaffe airmen.

The first man, the one who'd been thrown out of the plane when the hatch opened, got the worst of it. He fought like a cornered mongoose, but he didn't stand a chance against so many, or even just against Chip Wingate. The American gunner, in pajamas and a life jacket like Jamie, fought like a whole family of cornered mongooses, and he seemed to enjoy it, too. The others wrestled the flailing German airman to the ground, pinned him flat on his face, and wrenched his arms behind his back. Finally one of our ground crew pulled off his belt and used it to lash the German's arms together.

Even then he still kept struggling, like a red snapper reeled in from the green waves on a fishing line.

Someone snatched off the German's leather flight helmet and goggles.

I recognized Felix Baer.

Jamie:

Louisa lurched forward. Jane was hanging on her arm, and Ellen grabbed Louisa's other shoulder.

"Whisht. Take care," Ellen said.

They both recognized that captured German.

I was looking at "Odysseus."

One of his fellow airmen bent to yell a single ferocious word at him, and Felix Baer spat in his face in reply.

The other man wiped his cheek, and I saw he held a Luger pistol in his gloved hand, which in another second he pressed against Baer's head.

Almost everybody froze.

Not Tex. Sergeant Chester Wingate took this opportunity to slam his fist into Felix Baer's face and break his nose.

"*Stop it!*" Louisa screamed. "*What are you doing?*"

Ellen's arm was around her shoulder, but to be honest I think the only reason the kid didn't run forward to stop the fight herself was because of the old woman leaning on her.

I tried to wade in and stumbled. I was still shaking like a leaf. Silver hauled Chip off the German bloke by the back of his life jacket.

Felix Baer's face was awash with blood, one eye already beginning to swell shut. He spat again, but he might have been trying to clear his mouth. He said to the other German airman—my German is not fluent but I know what he said—"You can't kill me, you blockhead."

"No," answered the other, and according to Jane, he added, "but I'll blow your ear off if you don't stop fighting."

Felix Baer's teeth were chattering. I could see it—could see his jaw shaking as badly as my own hands. I had no doubt he was the pilot who'd been flying when his plane nearly collided with mine.

No one else noticed. Everybody was too busy starting a fresh brawl with the Luftwaffe airman holding a gun in the middle of an RAF aerodrome. There was another tussle, less dramatic than the

first, as our lads took possession of the pistol, searched the enemy, and grabbed hold of the third German while they were at it.

Felix Baer sat sullenly on the frozen ground watching with his hands tied behind him and his nose dripping blood. He kept his mouth pressed tightly shut, trying to calm the shaking.

I stepped forward and held my cigarette to his lips.

“Hell of a landing,” I congratulated him, even though I knew he wouldn’t understand it. “Glad you missed me.”

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Ellen:

I thought my heart would burst. I'd never seen Jamie Stuart so broken down he *couldn't light his own smoke*.

It made everybody quiet. Not a soul there but didn't see the trembling as his neat, slim fingers held out that cigarette to the enemy.

When Felix Baer lifted his head to take it, I saw that he was shaking too.

Then I knew why Jamie offered it. Death had missed them both by an inch, come close enough they saw what it looked like—now they were surprisingly alive after all and able to share a smoke.

Baer nodded and took a drag on Jamie's cigarette, sitting with his arms tied behind him, breathing hard and with a face like raw mince. Jamie stood there, helping him nurse the smoke as if the Jerry pilot were a burn victim on his back in hospital.

"Hey, anyone here speak Kraut?" Chip asked.

There was not one volunteer. Jamie gave a start, as if he were going to speak up for Mrs. Warner, but he thought better and kept quiet.

Then 648 Squadron's Wing Commander Talbot Cromwell came striding out, all ruffled up with importance, his frowning eyebrows like hairy caterpillars having a battle. Phyllis trotted behind him, running like a terrier to keep up.

"Beaufort-Stuart, what's the matter with you, are you some kind of collaborator now?" Cromwell rumbled. "Stand back. I want all three of these men under lock and key."

"Shall I ring Coastal Command Headquarters and ask for a prisoner transfer?" Phyllis offered.

"Pennyworth, don't you dare."

Phyllis looked startled. Jamie backed away from Baer and took a shaking, defiant pull on his Woodbine, watching our crabbit commander through narrowed eyes like hot coals.

Talbot Cromwell didn't want to let those Jerries out of his hands. He had a sack of excuses ready.

“This is an Intelligence issue uniquely connected to Windyedge,” he puffed. “There’s a designated agent to contact. I’ll conduct the first interview myself.” He took a keek around him and asked the same question as Chip: “Have we a German speaker here?”

Hanging on to Louisa with one arm, old Jane raised her other hand high. She stood straight as a spear, eyes snapping fire and ice, like a very ancient goddess. In her music hall trumpet of a voice, Jane volunteered, “I speak a little German.”

Old Cromwell’s hairy caterpillars tried to do backflips.

He growled, “Volunteer McEwen, what in blazes are these civilians doing on this aerodrome?”

“I had to collect the map courier from Stonehaven,” I said. “I gave Mrs. Warner and her girl a lift from the library, as a favor to Mrs. Campbell; no petrol wasted. But when the planes came in I didn’t take the time to drop off the civilian passengers. Sergeant Fergusson let us through. Sir!”

Cromwell barked at me, “Got an answer for everything, haven’t you, McEwen?” Then he barked at Phyllis and Jamie, “Flight Officer Pennyworth—incident report! Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart! Take your lads for debriefing. And get some clothes on, all of you.”

Cromwell turned to fire on someone else. “Lock up those Jerries in the limekilns—I’m told that’s a good, secure prison. The harbor master keeps the keys. Make sure they’ve got camp beds and blankets—oh, and paraffin heaters, it’s a bit damp. Send four lads to keep an eye on ’em—no, make that six, two for each, and make sure they’re armed.”

He paused to catch his breath. Then he lit his own cigarette and had a go at me again. “You take the old lady and the girl back to their lodgings. Tell Mrs. Campbell what’s going on. See that the Limehouse is closed to the public so we can use the place as a meeting room. Then get back here to collect the rest of us. I’ll question those Jerries myself, and I want Pimms there too.”

Jamie:

I rode to the Limehouse in the Tilly along with Cromwell, Chip, Silver, and Phyllis. By the time we got there, the public bar already looked like a medieval courtroom. A fire roared in the hearth, winking orange light off the coins in the black oak beams. The long table was pulled out to the middle of the floor, with three chairs set up on one side of it, facing toward the door. The other furniture was shoved out of the way.

The Old Roundhead walked in as if he owned the place and sat in the middle chair. He spread one of the new maps across the table.

“Over here, Pennyworth.”

Phyllis sat down obediently and got out her cardboard notebook.

“Now you, Flying Officer Silvermont. Show me how that Ju-88 came in.”

Silver pointed and scribbled with a china pencil. Chip and I hadn’t been told to do anything, so we stood stiffly at attention in front of the table.

Nancy Campbell had been told to clear off. She wasn’t allowed to hear what was going on. Ellen wouldn’t get a look-in, either. But after a minute Louisa nipped into the room and pressed herself against the wall next to the hall door, waiting for an appropriate gap to get Cromwell’s attention.

A few seconds later, the vestibule filled with the noise of thumping boots and slamming doors, and the three German airmen came trooping in. They’d been allowed to have their hands free, but they were escorted by guards with pistols. Behind the guards and their prisoners came the rest of Pimms Section. I don’t think I’d ever seen my lads so smart and polished, in smoke-blue RAF service dress uniforms, everybody’s face freshly washed and shaved and everybody’s hair slicked down with Brylcreem, even Dougie’s.

They lined up alongside Chip and me in front of Cromwell, with Pimms at one end and the German prisoners at the other. Harry

Morrow's head nearly brushed the low ceiling.

The Germans hadn't scrubbed up as well as us, even the two who hadn't taken a beating. They didn't have pressed uniforms to change into; they were wearing the flight suits they'd arrived in. I longed to get a good look at Baer, and turned my head ever so slightly to try to study him. His broken nose was taped with sticking plaster, while the rest of his swollen face was beginning to turn purple.

This was my *informer*—our *conspirator*.

Baer glanced around, too, and his eyes settled on the gramophone. Then he gazed at Louisa for exactly the same length of time.

Then he looked away. His battered face was absolutely blank.

They didn't let on that they recognized each other.

A thunderous, ringing silence seemed to fall, like the still moment when an aircraft's engine shuts down. Cromwell looked around impatiently.

"Where's the old girl?" he asked.

Louisa:

Jane took a long time in the bathroom and didn't want help. Waiting in our room, I heard the Tilly laboring up and down the hill as Ellen brought people over from the airfield. I opened one of the southeast windows, trying to eavesdrop. Doors slammed, and there was a hubbub of men's excited—maybe angry—voices. But they were muffled by the corner of the house and I couldn't understand a word.

I went to check on Jane. She'd been bolted in the bathroom for at least half an hour.

She opened the door when I knocked.

That old woman had transformed herself into a film star. I'm not sure what part she was playing—judge? Ambassador, perhaps? No—ambassador's wife? She'd changed into a long, tight-fitting black knit dress with a high neck and ruffles at the wrist and down the front. It was stylish and modern, though it couldn't be new. Her short silver bob was pulled back with glinting jet combs.

"Oh, Jane, you are *stunning!*" I exclaimed. "No wonder people can't tell how old you are!"

Jane smiled modestly and turned around. "Zip me up, please, darling. I simply cannot reach my own back anymore."

I zipped.

"Now, then, these ridiculous *sticks*. How I detest them! It will take me forever to get down the stairs and I know the young men are here already. Run ahead and tell them I am on my way."

Off I went back down, like a courier racing between army units.

The awful commander was busy looking at a map with David Silvermont when I came in, and I didn't like to interrupt. I stood against the wall waiting for a gap. Then I was glad I did, because it gave me a moment to set my face and not smile or frown or anything when Felix Baer looked me straight in the eye.

Did he *know*? Did he know it was me who'd figured out his codes, who was using them?

Almost instantly he turned away. I swallowed. Wing

Commander Cromwell glanced up.

“Well, girl! Is the old woman ready yet?”

“She’s coming down now,” I said. How was I supposed to address him? I didn’t have any idea. I added, “Sir. The stair takes her a while. She ought to have a comfortable place to sit.”

“Indeed. Kerr, Yorke, get moving,” Cromwell snapped, looking back down.

The wireless operators scrambled to rearrange the furniture, pulling Jane’s chair up to the table next to Cromwell. By the time they finished, Jane had arrived. I hovered at her elbow as she came in, wondering if Cromwell would kick me out when she was seated. Her sticks tapped against the stone floor, and for a moment the only sounds were that tapping and the crackle and hiss of burning peat.

Jane reached her chair and I took the sticks. She braced herself against the armrests and made her terrifying backward plunge into the seat. Jamie and Silver and even one of the German airmen threw themselves forward in alarm to try to support her.

Jane looked up and smiled.

“I am perfectly all right.”

“Pimms Section, *attention*,” ordered Wing Commander Cromwell, and they all leaped into their stiff lineup in front of the table.

I laid Jane’s sticks on the floor and purposefully planted myself behind her chair, holding my breath. Jane reached for my hand, anchoring me. “I need Louisa here, please,” she said. She raised her arm a little, and our hands stayed firmly clasped over her frail shoulder.

Cromwell looked at Jane, frowning. He looked up at me.

“You were here in November, weren’t you, Miss Adair?” he asked. “One of the hostages?”

I was astonished. I thought he had no idea who I was.

I’d known he was pigheaded and stuck on following rules, but I’d mistakenly also thought he was stupid. I realized now I might be jumping to conclusions, just like *everybody* did about me.

“Yes, sir,” I said politely.

“All right, I’ll allow it. Make a note, Flight Officer Pennyworth; the girl can take an oath of secrecy along with the rest.”

I was in.

He moved on as if he’d never noticed me in the first place.

“Find out why they’re here,” he said to Jane, and waved his

hand at the German prisoners.

Jane leaned forward. She spoke German hesitatingly, as if she were choosing her words with care. She was *good* at pretending to be an English woman speaking German. An old actress! She tilted her head, favoring her left ear, and waited for a response.

Felix Baer and one of the other Germans both spoke at the same time, and in a minute they were shouting at each other. Baer backed down first—he threw his hands up in frustration and waved the other man ahead.

“Eberhard Moritz,” the airman introduced himself, laying one hand on his heart. He stepped forward and held the hand toward Jane. When she took it, he bowed his head and gave her hand a formal kiss. Then he stepped back and answered her.

I listened and listened, trying to understand anything. But I couldn’t—not one word. It made me wild with frustration, even when Jane relayed his message. I hated being so ignorant.

“This man, this Eberhard Moritz, says he and his companions want to defect.”

“Defect!” echoed Cromwell in amazement.

Jane nodded. “He said they want to renounce Germany. Their connection to British Intelligence has been discovered and the Gestapo secret police are hunting for them—this flight was a perilous chance, and they had no choice but to take it. They dropped their life rafts in the North Sea to make it look as though they’d crashed on their way here! Moritz is their gunner, but he also leads their resistance cell. He apologizes for his companion’s behavior—that’s Felix Baer, the pilot.” She nodded toward him. “Moritz says that Baer tried to shoot their navigator, Dietrich Althammer, just before they landed, and Moritz had to wrestle the gun away from him.”

Jane paused, frowning. “They haven’t stopped arguing about Althammer,” she added. “That’s what you heard before Moritz spoke to me. They disagree as to whether he can be trusted.”

“Go on,” Wing Commander Cromwell said quietly.

“Moritz asks for amnesty for all three of them. But Baer says that Althammer is a double agent and is here on some dubious mission of his own. They went back and forth, you heard—arguing. Moritz accused Baer of carelessness on an earlier mission, and Baer denied it.” Jane added smugly, “They used stronger language, of course!”

Cromwell growled, "Ask Althammer for his side of the story."

Jane turned to the third German and murmured, "Dietrich Althammer?"

He bowed his head to her. When he saw how she tilted her left ear in his direction, he leaned closer so she could hear him. It reminded me of the way Jamie talked to her, patient and interested, as if the German navigator were used to speaking to old women. I suppose even Luftwaffe airmen must sometimes have grannies who are hard of hearing.

"Althammer says that Baer's distrust is egotistic nonsense," Jane said finally. "He thinks it is a war of protocol—Baer, the pilot, should naturally be the commanding officer of their aircrew. But in their resistance cell, Moritz, the lowly gunner, is the designated leader. So they argue over matters of authority."

"*Matters of authority!*" Wing Commander Cromwell gave a grunt of disgust.

It sounded a lot like Jamie's struggle with Cromwell, and I knew the commander would be puzzled—should he believe the German flight crew's commanding officer or the resistance cell's designated leader? Directly across from me, Jamie was lined up standing at attention at the end of the row beside Silver, and our eyes met. I thought they were both struggling not to laugh. I had to look away so they wouldn't infect me with it.

Wing Commander Cromwell rumbled, "If they can't agree on their story we can't get sense out of any one of them." Without warning he told the guard at the door, "Call Mrs. Campbell back out here. We all want tea."

Nan crept through and let herself behind the bar, where she put the kettle on to boil and tiptoed about rattling teacups. Jane and Eberhard Moritz started talking to each other again while Phyllis scribbled frantically in her cardboard notebook, trying to record everything properly.

It was hard not to fidget. Jamie's rigid Pimms Section crews stood lined up like statues. *Put your shoulders back, Lula, Mummy always told me as I stood up to play the flute. Make your daddy proud.* If Pimms could do it, so could I.

"Moritz says none of them will speak in confidence here," Jane relayed finally. "He objects to a civilian translator—that's me, you know—and requests a translator aligned with the services, and also reminds us that according to the Geneva Convention of 1929, he

and his companions are not required to tell you anything more than their name and rank.”

I thought that all sounded quite stuffed up, even if it was true. I looked over at Felix Baer. His face was turned away as if he couldn’t stand to watch. He was seething with fury.

Eberhard Moritz added something else, less stiffly.

“He’s just apologizing for being rude about me doing the translation,” Jane explained. “He credits my German as being very good.”

Baer tried once more. Pale beneath the bruises, he faced Cromwell directly. He reined in his anger, but I was sure he was *desperate* to make himself understood.

Jane was cool as she translated.

“He insists that Althammer is lying. He says that he and Moritz have risked their lives to deliver concealed information, which they hope will be of mutual benefit to Britain and Germany. Baer believes Althammer is trying to prevent them from delivering it.”

Jamie:

Nancy's clattering fell silent; she froze in the act of holding up her teapot. Cromwell sat with his mouth open and his fists clenched on the table in stark bafflement, waiting for a clear explanation.

I stared at the floor. I didn't dare catch Louisa's eye again.

Moritz and Baer uttered another dueling fugue of frustration and defiance.

I was torn over which of them to believe. I thought I knew what it was like to be Felix Baer, struggling with an unruly flight crew, utterly unable to sacrifice himself to authority because of his own experience and knowledge. But I also sympathized with Eberhard Moritz, trying to command someone who was uncooperative and had his own plans.

Was that how Cromwell felt about me? The same way I felt about my lads?

Mrs. Warner repeated in English, "Moritz says this place is informal and insecure. Baer says he won't share War Office information with anyone but his contact. A man called—Mr. Nestor?"

"*Nestor!*" exclaimed Wing Commander Cromwell.

My classical education wasn't going to waste after all. I knew who Nestor was: Odysseus's faithful advisor in *The Odyssey*.

Cromwell worked it out too.

"Nestor, indeed," Cromwell repeated. Then he sighed. "Our man with Intelligence, Robert Ethan, is in Abyssinia. What *damnable* poor timing. It will be at least a week before he can get here—if we can reach him."

He paused to think. Phyllis looked as if she were holding her breath.

"Pennyworth, make a call to Coastal Command Headquarters to send us a translator. One of their German-speaking wireless operators."

"Yes, sir. Now, sir? On the Limehouse telephone? It's a public line, sir."

“Ask for a Y girl. Mention Nestor and Odysseus. They’ll know what to do.”

Phyllis scurried off to the hall telephone.

Chip took two long steps forward and confronted Felix Baer. They glared at each other coldly. “I’ll take over if you want,” Chip said assuredly. “I’ll make him talk.”

He was going to get me another reprimand if he didn’t settle down. I clamped a hand hard on his shoulder and pitched my voice low.

“Back off, Tex.”

“C’mon, it won’t take long.”

Then I got insurrection from the Polish and Welsh contingent as well.

“If the Yankee breaks a few more filthy Nazi noses, no one will cry,” Ignacy said. “Or let Taff at them. He is good at throwing punches.”

Derfel nodded enthusiastically.

“Your U-boat score is thanks to these so-called Nazis,” I reminded them.

“Back in line, all of you,” barked Cromwell. “You’re a disgrace to enlisted men.”

Everybody snapped to attention again.

Cromwell spoke directly to the prisoners, cold and formal.

“This base is not equipped for a tribunal. As military men you will appreciate we have made hasty accommodation here, but I will postpone our discussion until an appropriate translator is summoned. I will not release you to a higher command until I have been ordered to do so by the contact you yourselves have named.”

After Mrs. Warner translated this, Cromwell pushed back his chair and stood.

“Every person here, subject to the King of England, is bound in the strictest confidence to anything witnessed here today.” He singled out the civilians. “Mrs. Campbell and Miss Adair—do you understand how weighty this matter is? If you ever speak of anything you have heard here, under the Official Secrets Act you will be considered accountable for treason.”

Louisa nodded seriously and whispered, “Yes, sir.”

Nancy Campbell just nodded.

Even I knew that wasn’t going to be good enough for Cromwell.

“Pennyworth!” he bawled. “Get back in here. I want you to

make a list of all those present and get them to sign it.”

While Phyllis got to work, the Old Roundhead allowed Nancy to tiptoe about the room serving cups of tea, which we all very much needed. She wouldn't go near the Germans, though.

“Louisa,” she whispered, “would you offer this to *them*, please?”

Their navigator, Althammer, stubbornly waved the tea aside. The gunner, Moritz, stared at Louisa curiously—the first Jamaican girl he'd ever seen?—and accepted his with a nod.

But that girl stood one second too long in front of Felix Baer as she held out the tea tray, and he stood one second too long searching her face before he picked up his cup.

Not staring, like Moritz. Communicating. Looking for the answer to a wordless question in a mutual language.

Louisa:

It was a crazy thing to do. But I wanted him to *know* we had the Enigma machine.

Face-to-face with him, I thought of a way to do it.

I lowered my head over the teapot and cup as I held out the tray. He could see my eyes, but I wasn't looking straight at him, so maybe no one else would notice. While his hand trembled faintly over the cup, I blinked my eyelids in Morse code.

I spelled out the only German word I knew: *danke*. Thank you.

I wasn't even sure he noticed.

Jamie:

“Danke,” he said to her, lifting the teacup, and she turned away quickly.

For such a quiet wee thing she seemed to have nerves of steel. She didn't spill a drop.

Louisa:

Jane created a distraction of her own.

She stood up. She never stood as dramatically as she sat, so long as she had something to push against, and just now she leaned on the table. “Sticks, Louisa,” she demanded. I gathered them up and gave them to her, and she toddled over to the piano.

Wing Commander Cromwell watched her, gaping a little comically—he hadn’t told her she might stand, but he couldn’t scold her the way he would have scolded Jamie.

“Louisa!” Jane called. “Wind the gramophone, please. There’s something I’d like us all to hear. An Italian version of a German composer recorded in London by a Polish pianist—”

She held up the record sleeve so everyone could see. It was a blocky modern painting of a dove and candle floating among blue musical notes.

Wing Commander Cromwell recognized it.

“Johanna von Arnim’s first record!” he exclaimed. “Great Scott, that goes back a bit! I heard her sing in the flesh, Béatrice in Berlioz’s *Béatrice et Bénédict*. She must have been over fifty then. But still a sensational performer!”

Jane blessed him with a saintly smile. “You’re a fellow opera lover!”

“It’s my opinion that von Arnim must have been the greatest mezzo-soprano of the last century. I greatly regret I was too young to hear her *Carmen*.”

Jane stood for a moment staring down at the record balanced in her hands, glowing.

But she didn’t say anything else. She just placed the record on the turntable and moved the needle into the outer groove.

The record spun, and the room flooded with the waterfall ripple of Bach’s Prelude in C, which I know perfectly well because it is the easiest thing he ever wrote for the keyboard and the only Bach that I can play; and over top of it, in slow, ringing tones of strength and beauty, came a woman’s voice like a bell, singing *Ave Maria, gratia plena*.

Everyone turned toward the sound—all the young British airmen and soldiers and the German prisoners too.

I have lived with music all my life. I grew up with it—an ordinary thing, a way to earn a living, always there to be shared. Granny Adair plaiting my hair and caroling hymns on a Sunday morning.

Hearing Daddy's strong, deep voice coming up the dusty road singing "Good Evening, Caroline"—Mummy and I both giving a scream of excitement, then racing to meet him. Falling asleep in a strange garden under colored paper lanterns in the dark, listening to Mummy playing the harp at some navy officer's wedding party. Turning pages for her at school-hall concerts, in Kingston and in London. Christmas songs at the piano and playing records for 648 Squadron's B-Flight on sunny afternoons and stormy nights.

Ordinary.

But this was something else.

This music—this music was *outside time*.

It was just a recording, a sound coaxed from shellac through a thorn needle. But while the music played, we were not doing anything but listening. We were not at war. We were not enemies. We weren't anybody special or different from each other—just people listening.

People listening to music together.

Jamie:

When the record ended I could hear the needle scratching in circles. We stood hushed.

Then the war had to begin again; the Germans were led to their prison, and the rest of us got ferried back to the airfield in the Tilly. Sitting on the floor in the back of the van, leaning against Silver's shoulder, the Bach was still with me like a lullaby, and I was asleep in the five minutes it took to ride to our barracks.

I dreamed I was leading Pimms Section over a shining sunlit sea hunting for U-boats. But there were no ships and no submarines, nothing but the shadows of coral reefs below clear turquoise waves all the way to the horizon, and dolphins leaping. When I tried to make a radio call to the other planes, nobody answered. The only thing I could hear on my headset was the high, haunting trill of a flute. It wasn't Bach, though. I didn't recognize the music, but I knew it was Mendelssohn.

Ellen:

Och, it didn't fash me I missed the interview with the German prisoners. I had my own fun. I drove Phyllis to Stonehaven to collect the German translator who came on the train the next day.

We'd been told her name, Sergeant Elisabeth Lind. *She'd* been told to look for the Tilly, I suppose. At the rail station I got out of the van first, and the translator made straight for me as she came through the barriers.

She wore a smart gray Parisian suit—though it must have been a mite outdated—beneath a sealskin coat as sleek as slate and soft as silk. Her hair, the color of ripe straw, was done in a tight plait around her head, like a picture postcard of a German milkmaid, if milkmaids went about in fur coats and matching pillbox hats. Her face was made up like a film star's, with long thick eyelashes and red lips.

I didn't recognize her straightaway because of the hair and makeup, but the moment I saw her eyes, clear bright hazel in her bonny vixen's face, I knew who she was—Jamie Stuart's wee German-speaking sister. The pair of them at Windyedge together!

I must have gawped, because she gave her lips a quick tap with a finger in a glove trimmed with soft gray chinchilla, telling me to hush, and I remembered that she was using someone else's name.

A cloud of soldiers and railway men buzzed about her like eager bees. She'd shared out her things amongst them—a small case, an even smaller overnight case, a handbag, and a gas mask. *God pity us*, I thought, swallowing a laugh and thinking of the 648 Squadron lads.

She minced up to me like a fairy in furs. I felt tall and awkward as she held out her small hand for me to shake as if we'd never met. She said, "Volunteer McEwen? I'm Sergeant Elisabeth Lind."

"Whisht, *Elisabeth*?" I repeated. "Just like the Queen!"

That was the name I'd given her myself—*Queenie*.

"*Sergeant Lind*, if you don't mind," she said quietly.

I'd seen her playacting a thousand times before, and I wasn't

going to give away her secrets any more than she'd give away mine. I didn't know what her game was, but if she'd found a way to playact and win the war—well, I was glad to see her having a good time. I liked my job, too, or at least as long as Cromwell wasn't poking his neb in.

I said, "Sergeant Lind it is, then."

She took her overnight case from the lad at her shoulder and unlatched it and tipped every single thing in it over the curb next to the Tilly. She made it look like an accident.

Shaness! I didn't know whether to laugh or to howl.

It was all lipsticks and face creams and kohl pots and unmentionable other female items, and the young men all scooted back in horror as if they'd tumbled into a snake pit.

"Don't worry, Volunteer McEwen will help me," she called over her shoulder to the lads, and most of them slunk away whilst only a couple of the hardiest, the ones holding her things, kept an eye on the queen bee from a safe distance.

We knelt on the cobbles with our heads together, and in a flash she muttered at my ear, "Please warn Jamie—I'm sorry about the surprise! My commanding officer feels that German prisoners are more at ease with a native speaker translating, and as he isn't here and I am good at being Swiss, they simply *wouldn't* send anyone else—"

"You do it very well and all," I whispered.

"Don't speak as if you know me," she warned.

Phyllis got herself out of the Tilly and now came bounding over to help pick things up.

"I'm Flight Officer Pennyworth," she said breathlessly, sweeping bits and pieces back into the case. "Or Phyllis, when we're off duty. Hello and welcome! How very embarrassing—we'll have this tidied in no time—"

Phyllis shooed away the last of the admirers. "Is this her handbag? Follow Volunteer McEwen with the other case, thank you—Ellen, open the back, I'll finish here."

In no time the show was over and I'd not said anything I shouldn't have.

"Sergeant Lind" sat herself in the passenger seat of the Tilly. Phyllis climbed in back so that we shouldn't have to squeeze up together in the front. But as I headed out to the Aberdeen road, even from the back Phyllis managed to keep the chitchat going.

"We'll let you settle in at the Limehouse, Sergeant Lind, and then Ellen can drive us to the aerodrome for three o'clock. I've got a pile of gen to prep you on—information, I mean, background and such. I do apologize, you're not English, are you? I'll try to simplify the lingo. We've arranged a bicycle for you, as it's not far and it saves on petrol—oh dear, you are able to ride a bicycle?"

Sergeant Lind laughed. "I'm pretty fluent in English and I do know how to ride a bicycle. Don't worry, it will be easier in uniform than in this coat."

She was playacting even with her own posh accent, speaking English like royalty, as if she had a mouth full of river pebbles and could neither swallow them nor spit them out. I thought I'd strangle with laughter—I wished I had a smoke, just to think about something else.

"Thank goodness it isn't snowing," Phyllis said anxiously. "They have been walloped with it west of here. Perhaps we can arrange for boots if you haven't brought any."

"Thank you, I should love for boots to be arranged!"

I am not ashamed to say I gave thanks to God that I didn't have to speak to her myself. I didn't trust myself to speak a *word*.

As Sergeant Elisabeth Lind swept into the Limehouse, Phyllis was too busy trying to make her feel at home to notice my face doing acrobatics. Mrs. Warner was in her chair by the fire and Louisa on the piano stool where she often perched, and they both watched the queen bee with interest.

"Mrs. Campbell?" called Phyllis. "Mrs. Campbell, could you come through? Sergeant Elisabeth Lind is here—the German translator."

Nan planted herself behind the bar with her hands on her hips. "Not another one!" she exclaimed.

"You already have a translator?" asked Sergeant Lind.

"I meant—" Poor Nan went red.

"Not another German?" guessed Elisabeth Lind. "No. I am Swiss. I am from Bienne, and my first language is French, but I speak German, too." She laughed. "And English, of course!"

She unpinned her sealskin hat and laid it on the brass counter, and unbuttoned her soft gloves. She was no taller than Louisa and had to stand on her toes to lean across the bar. She said, "I am at the disposal of Wing Commander Cromwell. I am to stay here at the Limehouse, and Flight Officer Pennyworth will brief me on what's

happened at the aerodrome.”

Nan gave a wobble of her head with her mouth open as if she had forgotten how to speak.

Elisabeth Lind filled in the gap. “You needn’t call me Sergeant unless I’m in uniform—as your guest, Miss Lind will do nicely. I would like to go to my room now, if I may, and freshen up before I visit the aerodrome. I never do sleep on the train....”

She leaned in closer to Nan and added in a low voice, “And if you could make me a cup of coffee it would be the best present I have ever been given.”

“There’s only ersatz coffee,” Nan said sulkily. “Chicory syrup. I daresay it’s not what you’re used to.”

“Indeed I am,” the translator said triumphantly. “It’s the same in every RAF canteen since the war started. I would be delighted to receive a cup of ersatz coffee.”

She dropped back down on her heels and took a keek at her surroundings: wishing coins, piano, gramophone, stone floor, fireplace, white-haired old woman, brown-skinned Louisa.

“Hello.” She gave Louisa that crooked smile of hers, friendly.

“Miss Lind,” Louisa answered politely like a good wee Colonial. “I’m Louisa Adair. I look after Mrs. Campbell’s aunt Jane.”

Mrs. Warner waved hello from her chair by the fire.

“Oh.” Elisabeth Lind laughed again. “A house full of women! I am glad. I was worried they would make me stay at the air base.”

I did not dare catch anyone’s eye. I could not imagine the fireworks when she came up against Wing Commander Cromwell.

But I knew she was a canny and a clever lass, good at getting her own way, and perhaps she’d be better able to manage him than Jamie or I.

“I’ll show Miss Lind to her room,” said Nan. “She can have Number Four. The best double. Louisa, bring her up a cup of coffee, would you?”

“Please don’t be long,” Phyllis said anxiously. “Wing Commander Cromwell is expecting us.”

“I won’t be two ticks,” said Sergeant Lind. “Just the time it takes to finish my coffee and change!”

I felt limp with relief when she left the room.

Jamie:

Cromwell brought her into the officers' lounge to introduce her.

"Sergeant Elisabeth Lind will be with us for a week or so as a German translator."

Elisabeth Lind? Well, it wasn't the first time she'd made me call her by some made-up name.

Every young man in that room catapulted to his feet. Ignacy bowed. She was wearing an air-force blue WAAF uniform exactly like Phyllis's, but we didn't meet many new girls, and this one, as I knew well, lapped up attention. People leaped to pull out a chair for her, light her cigarette, get her a tea. Gavin Hamilton and Dougie Kerr squabbled over who'd hold her gas-mask bag. When Dougie lost, she made it up to him by listening attentively to his life's story.

I had enough trouble with my lads. I didn't need this.

She met my eyes briefly, and I could tell she was very worried I was going to blow her cover.

She tried carefully to stay away from me. Fair enough. She'd gone to a lot of trouble with her makeup so the Stuart family resemblance wouldn't be obvious.

Derfel and Ignacy were the only ones who sat down again besides me. We let the others get on with it.

"Scotty, you look like you have got a headache," Ignacy said.

I was leaning on one elbow, shading my eyes with my hand. I lifted my face in an effort to appear more sociable.

"I was expecting a Teutonic battle-ax, not a flipping Rhine maiden," I said.

"What do you not like about Rhine maidens?" he joked.

"God, look at Yorkie," I complained. "He's got his arm around her waist already. In the officers' lounge! I'd better break it up."

I heaved myself out of my chair again. I wasn't sure if I was protecting my baby sister from my squadron or protecting my squadron from my baby sister.

But by the time I'd crossed the room she'd managed perfectly well to protect herself, skillfully extracting her slender waist from

Bill Yorke's grip all on her own. She cozied up to Phyllis, making it harder for the lads to get near her. Now she was chatting to Chip, and didn't look at me until Phyllis tugged her arm and said, "This is Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart. He's in charge of B-Flight and flies with Pimms. They're the ones who picked up all the German messages."

"Oh yes, I've heard about you from your wireless operators." She still didn't look at me as she spoke. "You're on the list to be interviewed."

"Whenever you like," I said, trying not to provoke her.

"I hope there's not much more opening ceremony," she added. "I'm here to talk to the prisoners, and I would quite like to get on with it."

Once the shock began to wear off, I realized how hard it was going to be to ever get to talk to her alone—even harder than trying to talk to Ellen. "Happy to have a chat with you now in the debriefing room, Flight Officer Lind," I said through my teeth.

She pealed with laughter. "Whatever would the rest of your squadron think if we two had a private *tête à tête*? Your interview is with your wing commander, not with *me*. And it's *Sergeant* Lind." She turned aside to show me her stripes. "I'm a translator—not in charge of anything!"

I didn't answer. I could do without her laughing at me in front of B-Flight, and she'd been bloody cheeky about questioning them already. God knew what she'd pulled out of Dougie. My sullen silence made her throw me a curious glance. Then she looked away quickly, puffing on her cigarette.

"I'd love to get a chance to chat to the old woman at the inn, though," she said thoughtfully. "Jane Warner, is that her name? I wonder what she thought of the Germans when she spoke to them. It might be useful."

"Buy her a drink," I suggested. "She likes whisky and water. It'll cost you two and six."

Louisa:

Mrs. Campbell hated having the Germans around.

She also hated Elisabeth Lind, who felt like a sort of German. She hated waiting on her and cooking for her, and Mrs. Campbell hated having to feed the real Germans, too. She made them corned beef sandwiches and porridge and sent them flasks of tea or pretend coffee. But she wouldn't take the food to them. She tried to get Morag to do it, but after the first day Morag carried on so much, crying real tears because she was so afraid of Nazis, that Nan asked me to take over. And I was glad to.

Those limekilns! I couldn't shake that haunting "lion kill" shiver just at the thought of them, only these ones *really did* hold brave and terrible people locked inside.

The limekilns were like honeycomb cells in the hillside, and each German airman was shut in his own cold cavern prison behind a huge oak door like the entrance to a dungeon. When the guards let me through with the tea and sandwiches, the makeshift cells were every bit as chilling in real life as in my head. The walls were mildewed whitewash over bare stone, with old lime ovens bricked up in the back. One electric lightbulb hung from the ceiling in each cell, and the only furniture was portable camp beds, wooden folding chairs, and paraffin heaters.

Eberhard Moritz and Dietrich Althammer nodded thanks to me when I came in, but otherwise I might as well have been invisible. I bet they were just as aloof when Morag brought them food the day before, with too many important things on their minds to be curious about timid teenage serving girls. They were perfectly polite, even to their guards, so I don't know why she was so wet about it. All I had to do was put dishes on a packing crate and move on to the next cell. But Felix Baer...

When I came in with his porridge and coffee, two days after he got there, he was lying on his back staring up at the whitewashed ceiling. His face was a mess of black bruising, but he turned his head as the door opened.

He sat up slowly when he saw me, swung his legs over the side of the bed, and got to his feet. He strode to the bricked-up kiln and stood with his back to me and the two soldier boys who were on guard. Then, as if he wanted to show how much he disdained us, he began to whistle.

My heart fell. What did I expect—a big welcoming smile? For him to hand over more cipher machine settings with a flourish? For him to kiss my hand, like Eberhard Moritz did to Jane? Felix Baer wasn't that stupid, anyway. He knew I wasn't supposed to have anything to do with him.

Maybe I just wanted to hear another *danke*. I never imagined he'd turn his back on me on purpose—even the other two German prisoners hadn't been *rude*.

Then I realized he was whistling the opening bars to the *Hebrides Overture*.

But no—as he went on I recognized that it wasn't the beginning. It was a similar eight bars from somewhere in the middle. He didn't go on—he just repeated those eight bars. And the rhythm was off. It was off in odd places—sometimes it seemed right, other times he seemed to stutter.

Oh crumbs, was it Morse code?

My heart lurched. I balanced the edge of the tray on the packing crate with one hand, and with the other I lifted the coffee flask and put it down on the crate.

I'd showed him I understood Morse. Was he doing it on purpose—for *me*?

My whole body gave a shudder.

He *was*. I knew he was.

But I'd only just learned Morse, and when I practiced with Jane I was much slower listening to it—"receiving"—than I was at transmitting. He repeated the same passage three times, and I still didn't catch most of the letters. I heard *As* and *Ms* and an *I*.

I wasn't fast enough. I was going to miss it because I wasn't fast enough.

I picked up the china cup Mrs. Campbell had sent, and instead of putting it next to the coffee flask, I gave it a whack against the edge of the tray and let it slip from my fingers and smash on the dirt floor.

"*Bother!*" I exclaimed loudly.

Baer stopped whistling. He spun around to look.

"Oh dear, what a mess—" I apologized to the guards, and mimed sweeping. "Let me run and get the dustpan and another cup."

"Need a hand?" one of them asked.

I put the whole tray down on the packing crate next to the thermos flask. "No, I'm fine, but it was clumsy of me! I'll be back in a jiffy—is that all right?"

"Jerry's not going anywhere," said the guard.

When I came back five minutes later, Baer was pacing. He didn't look at me. But he kept whistling the whole time I was sweeping up the broken crockery, and eventually I got it—there wasn't much to get, only twelve letters, over and over, fitted carefully into eight bars of Mendelssohn.

FA

LLE

FA

LLE

ENIGM

ENIGM

A

X

I'd nearly finished clearing up when Wing Commander Cromwell came in, steering Sergeant Elisabeth Lind ahead of him with a big hand on her shoulder. For a moment, Baer didn't stop pacing, or whistling. But he stopped whistling in Morse. He finished the music naturally, in its proper rhythm. Then he gave a little bow to Cromwell and the translator.

One of the soldiers pulled up a folding chair next to the portable heater for Miss Lind. She sat down primly with her hands in her lap.

"Sorry, sir, I've just finished tidying this," I said.

"On you go, then," Cromwell rumbled. He opened a tin of cigarettes and offered one to Baer.

Miss Lind sat waiting for her translation duties to begin. I thought she looked angry; her narrow-eyed glare reminded me of something. A cornered rat? Something else, too. It was hard to tell what she really looked like behind the big fake eyelashes.

I picked up the tray and the broken bits and pieces, leaving a

poor cold breakfast for Felix Baer.

I was bursting to find out what *FA LLE ENIGMA* meant.

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Jamie:

The weather got worse as the day wore on. Evening brought a storm of howling sleet, impossible to fly in. I probably couldn't have stopped anyone from slogging to the Limehouse through the gale if I'd tried, and I didn't want to test my strength on something so harmless. There was a stack of jazz records, and now there were *four* females worth dancing with, not counting Nancy, who could probably be persuaded if you were feeling generous. Sergeant Elisabeth Lind was at the bar when we got there, leaning in on her elbows to talk to Mrs. Campbell. She wore civilian clothes: a tight-fitting gray skirt and a just-as-tight black pullover with a high neck. She turned when we came in and pressed her shoulder-blades against the bar, facing the room. It would be hard for any of the lads to get his arm around her.

The other lasses, Phyllis and Ellen and Louisa, huddled at the table by the fire with Mrs. Warner. They looked as if they were waiting for a show to start.

That's exactly what they got as B-Flight sailed in, all eighteen airmen from Pimms and Madeira. Elisabeth Lind smiled at Yorkie, who reached her ahead of the pack, and then at Chip, who was about one second behind him. They whipped their sixpences from the beam above her head, slapped them down on the brass counter at exactly the same time, and chorused, "Can I buy you a drink?"

They couldn't have been more in unison if they were on stage performing Gilbert and Sullivan. Everybody laughed.

"I need to pull Yorke in line," I murmured to Silver.

"Give him something to do, maybe."

The lads gathered around Sergeant Lind like bees around a blooming rose. They lit pipes and cigarettes and grabbed for their wishing coins to buy drinks.

"I don't like these thick walls," Elisabeth Lind said, ducking out of the way as Harry Morrow reached over her head to pull his sixpence from the ceiling.

"Why?" asked Chip. "Because the house is so old?"

"No, because ghosts live in thick walls. They live in the walls like damp. If you want to get rid of them, you have to light the place up. Then they come out to get warm. They dry up when they get warm enough, also like damp, and then you don't have to worry about them anymore." She took a sip of a discreet wee sherry that was all she'd settled on. "What this place needs is a good blaze."

"We can fix that!" said Gavin Hamilton, the Australian navigator, and stirred the fire.

"That's a jolly daft theory." Adam Stedman laughed. He hailed the landlady. "Mrs. Campbell!"

There wasn't room for all of us at the bar. I stood by the ladies' table with my hands in my pockets. "All right, Jamie Stuart?" Ellen asked, grinning.

"Aye, no bother, lass," I answered.

Elisabeth Lind was going after Ignacy now, either because he was safe or because he was more of a challenge, being joined at the hip with Derfel. "Where were you when Hitler chopped Poland in half and threw the bones to Stalin?" she asked him. "How did you get out?"

"On foot and by ship, through Istanbul and Casablanca," Ignacy answered. I knew for a fact that it had taken him most of a year to get here, and he was proud of it. He threw the question right back at her. "You are Swiss," he said. "Your country is neutral. Why do you put on a British uniform every morning?"

She shrugged.

"My school chums are all French and English. I came with them, when the war started. Also"—she laughed—"I love to dance."

The moment everyone was waiting for! Silver extracted himself from the pileup around the bar and made for the gramophone. "May I, Mrs. Warner?"

"Go right ahead!" said the old woman with a benevolent wave to the local population, like Queen Victoria on her tour of Scotland.

Silver put on a record. It was a popular song from five or so years ago—about a third of Mrs. Warner's records were banned in Germany. "Ah, American jazz!" Sergeant Lind exclaimed, tugging Ignacy by the hand. "Cab Calloway playing 'Moonglow'! I couldn't stay neutral when dance music is at stake. Just by *listening* to it you're undermining Hitler. Come along, I *know* you're a good dancer."

Holding Ignacy's hand, she coaxed him into a small space

between tables, raised her other hand so he could put his arm around her waist, and let him lead. They glided over the flagstone floor in a seamless fox-trot. Ignacy was a good dancer, formal and light-footed. She picked the right bloke to show off with.

When the record ended, Ignacy thanked her in French. They chattered to each other in French for a minute, nothing of any substance—Ignacy knew I was listening, and thanks to my French grandmother my French is as good as my English. No doubt Mrs. Warner knew what was going on, too. The rest of Madeira and Pimms flew into a competition over who would get the next dance, clearing floor space and arguing over records.

“I love a good hop!” exclaimed Phyllis, jumping to her feet. “I’m in!”

She held out a hand, and Harry Morrow grabbed it first. Silver went for tall Ellen.

Louisa looked directly at me.

She gave a quick, bright-eyed nod, pushed back her chair, and stood up.

In two steps I was by her side with my hand out.

“Like to dance, Louisa?”

Louisa:

I knew I only had about three minutes.

He was taller than me, but he didn't tower over me like the others. His eyes were the clear green-yellow-brown of sunlight through palm fronds, and his hands holding mine were cool and fine-boned. He bent his head and we were face-to-face, closer than I'd ever been to any boy. I'd never even *danced* with a boy before—at school there were only girls, and we danced with each other.

Silver set the needle on the record. It was another Cab Calloway tune, "Jitterbug," fast and lighthearted. Harry and Phyllis were laughing together. I fixed a smile on my face—it was easy to smile at Jamie, but not so easy to pretend we were making small talk about jazz or Jamaica.

"We can't use anything we learned from the coding machine anymore," I told him. "Odysseus. He warned me."

He didn't miss a step.

"How?"

"Morse code. No accident."

FALLE. ENIGMA.

"The Nazis are onto him, and they're onto us, too, I think," I rushed on. "Jane translated. He said 'Trap, trap; Enigma, Enigma.'"

"Yes, I think they've been onto him for a while," Jamie breathed. "*Buckets of blood.*"

We were both a little breathless now. He guided our steps toward Jane, on the edge of the dancers, and spun me to face away so the others couldn't see me speaking.

"Jane and I talked about it," I told him. "I haven't had a chance to tell Ellen. The Germans must know we're breaking their codes. Now they're trying to catch us."

He nodded in understanding.

"Trying to catch *you*," I corrected, because it wasn't me flying out over the North Sea hunting for submarines.

"That last message"—he spoke close to my ear, almost in a whisper, hurrying—"the one you passed to me after the weird

'happy wagon' message. *U BOAT OPERATIONS UTSIRA XIV II*. I wondered if the date was wrong. February fourteenth gives us two whole weeks' more lead time than the other messages. Utsira's an island off the coast of Norway. You think that's a setup?"

"*I don't know*," I said. "It could be. They could lure you there and send in night fighters and you'd all be dead."

His hands tightened around mine.

"When did you see Baer?" he asked.

"I take him his meals. And the others, too."

"Louisa, you'll get in trouble."

"Won't we all?" The phony smile felt like it was going to crack my face. "Aren't we *already* in trouble?"

The record was coming to an end.

"Don't go to Utsira on the fourteenth!" I begged. "You don't *need* to go hunting for U-boats."

"We've got to go where they send us," he pointed out. "Even on Valentine's Day!" He laughed, pretending it was nothing. Dancers talking about Valentine's Day!

"Tell Ellen," I said.

"I will." His smile was phony too.

We were out of time.

Mrs. Campbell cleared everybody out at ten, so it was late when I heard tapping at the door of Room Number Five, where I was already in my nightdress. I opened the door expecting Ellen.

But it was Elisabeth Lind.

She looked ready for bed, except her face still glowed with perfect paint. Her fairy-tale-gold hair was unpinned in one long plait, bound with a black silk ribbon. She wore a quilted gray silk dressing gown that made her look like she was snuggled into a cloud. I couldn't see much of what was underneath, but black silk printed with silver peonies clung to her ankles.

Her elegant clothes weren't new. The dressing gown was fraying, its sleeve ends whipped with thread that didn't quite match. There was a hole in the quilting somewhere, because now and then she shed a down feather or two, like a molting chicken. It wasn't just thrifty wartime mending—her clothes had been *made over*. I did the same thing to Mummy's clothes to make them fit me, which is why I noticed. Elisabeth Lind's expensive dressing gown was hemmed and tucked because it used to belong to a taller

woman—to *someone else*.

She wasn't as wealthy as she seemed. I felt like I'd won a round of poker. I knew more about her than she knew about me.

"Ah, Louisa, I'm sorry to disturb you so late! Could you help me? I can't make my gas fire come on."

"Oh—" I glanced at Jane, already in bed.

Jane put her book aside and pulled herself up in curiosity. "What's the matter, darling?"

"I'm going to light the fire for Miss Lind," I told her.

"Of course," Jane agreed. "It's very cold tonight."

I snatched up my own silk dressing gown—Mummy's, that is, also not new—and followed Miss Lind down the dark passage.

No one had stayed in Room Number Four since Felix Baer, though Robert Ethan had poked about in it. There was plenty of credit on the meter. Miss Lind watched politely while I showed her how to turn on the gas.

"You're a keen reader," she said irrelevantly.

I drew in a sharp breath and stared at her, startled. She'd been noticing things about me, too.

"Well, I am," I said. "How do you know?"

She laughed at my expression. "I saw the books in your room."

"Jane has books," I said warily.

"*Swallows and Amazons*? *National Velvet*? Those aren't hers. She's over eighty. You're in your teens."

"You're Swiss," I said. "Those are English books."

She shrugged. "I went to school with English girls. We swapped. Reading English books is how I learned English. And listening to the BBC, of course!"

She did sound like she'd learned English by listening to the BBC, posh as posh.

She knelt beside me on the hearth. "Let me try the fire now," she said. She turned off the gas tap and the fire went out. She turned it back on, struck a match carefully, and lit it again.

"Have you read any Greek myths?" she asked. "Bulfinch's *The Age of Fable*? Or Lamb's version of Homer's *Odyssey*, perhaps?"

How much did she know about our "Odysseus"—and was she wondering the same thing about me? If so, she was being cautious about it.

I thought I should be cautious too. She could go straight to Cromwell with anything I said.

"No," I said. "No, I haven't, but we read *The Children's Homer* in school." I stood up. "I have to help Jane get ready for bed."

"Isn't she in bed already?" Miss Lind tilted her head to look up at me with her crooked smile.

"Yes, but—I have to turn out the fire. And the standing lamp. You're all right now, aren't you? You did that perfectly."

Beneath the powder and lipstick her face nagged at me, familiar—until all I could think was that she reminded me a bit of Felix Baer himself. With his bruised eyes and swollen nose I couldn't tell what he really looked like, either.

Miss Lind stood up now too, in a swish of gray and black silk. She snatched my hand and squeezed it as if we'd known each other for years.

"I won't keep you," she said. "But I don't know if I shall get you to myself again. I can't ask you about Odysseus when anyone's listening."

I stood still, my hand in hers.

"I don't know what you mean," I said carefully. "I thought you were here to help Wing Commander Cromwell while he's questioning the Germans."

"Let's not play this stupid game," she said. "I know you've heard the name Odysseus because I've been briefed about everything that's happened here. I know he's one of the Germans locked up in those awful pits below the hill; he's Felix Baer, the pilot. He's supposed to talk to me. They're all supposed to talk to me; I'm standing in for their British contact. I even have a code name from *The Odyssey*, which Eberhard Moritz made up himself just in case this happened, so they can identify me and trust me."

It took every ounce of strength in my body not to pull my hand away. My skin crawled with suspicion, as if I'd bathed in syrup and woken up covered with ants. I said quietly, "What do you need me for, then?"

"My code name is *Calypso*," Miss Lind let go of my hand. "Do you remember who Calypso is, from your *Children's Homer*? She's a goddess who lures Odysseus to her lonely island by singing to him. Then she won't let him leave for seven years." She hugged the gray silk around her. "Calypso is also a type of music in the West Indies. Perhaps you know that."

"Yes, in Trinidad," I said.

"Where are you from?" she asked me. "Jamaica, isn't that right?"

An island in the Caribbean Sea, like Trinidad. Even the British tried to ban calypso music, and I'm sure most Germans don't bother to distinguish where it comes from, if they've even heard of it. Just another type of forbidden music from a West Indian island full of British subjects of the Crown."

She'd lost me completely now. I shook my head, wondering if she was a little mad. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I need your help," said Elisabeth Lind. "None of the Germans believe I've been sent by their British contact. They won't tell me *anything*, and I know why. Felix Baer thinks *you're* Calypso."

How was I supposed to know it was a code name?

"I didn't do it on purpose—" I gasped. "I didn't know!"

The *disappointment* was almost as great as the shock.

Of course Felix Baer hadn't thought there was anything special about *me*. He hadn't left me his message or singled me out because he thought I was clever or brave or connected to the aerodrome. He knew only that his contact was called Calypso, and here was I, fresh out of the Caribbean Sea and able to recognize Mendelssohn.

But I'd still helped, hadn't I? Without me, B-Flight would never have found those U-boats. I'd helped a *little*, even if it was unofficial and over now.

"How can I fix it?" I asked. "How can I tell him?"

She shook her head, looking into the fire.

"I don't honestly know," she said. "648 Squadron's dragon of a wing commander is always breathing down my neck whenever I see any of the German prisoners. I have my own commanding officer who's supposed to cope with this, but he's in *Africa*, and I can't even speak to him. I'm just a deputy—I'm still in training and I feel rather out of my depth. None of those Germans want to talk to me *anyway*, not with Cromwell there, even if they believed I'm their contact."

She turned to look at me searchingly. Her expression was softer now, and for a split second I nearly caught why she looked so maddeningly familiar, and then it was gone.

"You believe me, don't you?" she asked uncertainly, and it was like seeing a big crack opening up in a suit of armor.

I nodded. "You couldn't know about Calypso otherwise. He called me that the first time he was here."

"Let me think about what we can do," she said. "You think

about it too. I wish Cromwell wasn't involved. I wish *you* weren't involved—"

That's when Nancy Campbell barged in without even knocking.

"Aunt Jane's just gone downstairs on her own without her sticks, hanging on the banister and hunting for hot water bottles," Nancy said shortly. "So I've made one up for her and helped her back to bed. Heavens, Louisa, I don't pay you to sit about blethering! I shall cut your week's wages if I have to see to Jane again!"

I opened my mouth to make excuses, and shut it without a word.

Jane going down those stairs in the inky dark, on her own, without her sticks!

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Campbell!" I gasped, leaping to my feet. "It won't happen again."

But as I rushed from the room I realized how hard it would be to catch Miss Lind alone another time.

Ellen:

The moon was nearly full, but it was pig-awful dreich flying weather. At Windyedge we had sheets of sleety rain; five miles inland, higher up, the moors got a blanket of snow. Three Blenheim ops got canceled. The lads slept all afternoon in case of a nighttime clear-up, and Phyllis and I stayed at the Limehouse making toast over the fire while Louisa and Jane pounded out piano duets.

Louisa was tense as a fiddle string. Whenever they finished a tune and Jane turned pages, Louisa leaped up to peep through the rain-flecked front window.

The only folk who came in were Wing Commander Cromwell and Elisabeth Lind, after their afternoon with the Jerry prisoners.

“Sergeant Lind, you’re dismissed. Volunteer McEwen, take me to the aerodrome,” Cromwell demanded. “Come along, Flight Officer Pennyworth, you’re needed to write up my report. Toss your cycles in the Hillman, and you can ride back later and save the van making another trip.”

Oh, ta very much, Wing Commander Cromwell. Flight Officer Pennyworth and I were looking forward to a push-bike ride through a sleet storm!

While Phyllis and I pulled on our overcoats, Sergeant Lind stirred up the fire and then threw herself down in Jane’s comfortable chair. But she didn’t call for Nan to get her tea or coffee or sandwiches. As we filed out after Cromwell, I stole a keek in her direction, and, oh, was I going to have to worry about her and Jamie both now? She was that tightly wound she couldn’t relax. She sat stiff and straight, gripping the arms of that chair like she wanted to break them off, staring at Louisa’s piano-playing back as if she were trying to lay a curse.

I dropped off Cromwell and Phyllis and slogged back on my push-bike, dodging icy raindrops and spraying slush up my shins. I was away about twenty minutes. When I came into the dry at the Limehouse again, the musicians were still tinkling away at the piano, and Sergeant Lind was asleep with her head on the table.

Jane turned to smile at me.

I raised one finger to my lips and pointed. "*Whisht.*"

Jane didn't lift her hands from the piano keys—just let them fall still. She sat with her head atilt, favoring her left ear. After a few more notes Louisa stopped playing, too, and listened.

The big room was mostly empty, but it was full of soft wee noises: the sound of the low peat fire burning, the Scotch pine boughs swishing outside in the wind, sleet tapping against the window glass.

And Elisabeth Lind was talking quietly to herself in German. In her sleep.

"She's counting," Jane told us. "Up to thirty. She's done it three times."

"It is German, isn't it?" Louisa asked softly, with her worried frown.

"It's Swiss German," Jane said. "She's just counting."

We held still, listening to the wind and rain and fire, and to that slurry voice murmuring in German.

"*What is she doing?*" Louisa hissed.

"I think she's practicing," the old woman said. "So she doesn't blow her cover story. Her standard German is excellent and she has a lovely regional Helvetian accent. French may well be her first language. But she didn't learn it in Switzerland, and she certainly isn't Swiss."

"Don't let Nan hear you," Louisa begged.

Eins, zwei, drei... achtzewanzig, nünzewanzig, dreissig. Eins, zwei, drei...

I went to give flipping Mata Hari a gentle tap on the shoulder to wake her up and shut her up. I wondered what Cromwell had said to those Jerries, and what Felix Baer had said to her. I was glad I didn't have her job.

Louisa came into the bathroom to brush her teeth while I brushed my hair. We ran the taps like spring torrents to cover our whispered secrets.

"That German pilot—Odysseus, Felix Baer—" She was so quiet I had to lean in to hear her. "He won't talk to Miss Lind. *He thinks I'm his contact.*"

I dropped the hairbrush.

Over the noise of the water the clatter wasn't anything. Louisa

stayed bent over the basin.

"You don't even speak German!" I exclaimed.

"Remember he talked about Calypso when he was here the first time? That's her code name. He thought it was me—that I'd been sent to meet him. And when I gave him that tea, in the pub after Chip punched him up, I thanked him by blinking at him in Morse code! *So stupid of me!* I just—I just wanted to talk to him, somehow. And when he warned me about the trap, I messed about to give us time! Now I don't know how to fix things. I tried to talk to him today and I couldn't, not with the guards listening! I don't know what to do."

I picked up the brush and weighed it in my hand.

I took a deep breath.

Finally I whispered, "You should give the cipher machine to Sergeant Lind."

"What about Jamie?" Louisa objected.

"Even if we had the new settings for it, we daren't use it now, not if they're trying to catch him. Give the machine to Sergeant Lind," I said again. "She's the one your Jerry meant it for; she'll know what to do with it."

"How can we trust her?" Louisa gasped.

I put down the hairbrush and wound my shawl tight about my shoulders. Queenie, that canny, bonny lass, my old friend, was putting on her nightdress in the next room, and I had to pretend I didn't know who she was! It was hard.

But Louisa needed to know.

"She's our Jamie's sister," I whispered over the rushing water. "You can trust her because she's Jamie's sister."

"*Oh!*"

Louisa laughed wildly.

"*Of course she is!*"

She leaned over the basin with her toothbrush, which had not come near her teeth for at least five minutes.

"Whisht. Don't tell," I hurried to add. "She wants the Germans to think she's Swiss."

"*Jamie's sister!* Their eyes are exactly the same! No wonder she hides behind those stick-on lashes! But," Louisa asked breathlessly, "won't she tell Cromwell? Isn't she supposed to?"

"I don't think so," I said. "I don't think he's meant to know a thing about it. She might report it to her own commanding officer."

But she'd have a long jaw with Jamie before she did that. If she ever catches him alone."

"How am I going to catch *her* alone?" Louisa wailed.

That was the hard part. Sharing a room with Phyllis. Always carrying some gadgy in the van. Cromwell breathing down your neck. Worrying Nan would hear you.

"Do *you* talk in your sleep?" Louisa asked suddenly, reading my mind. "What if Phyllis heard? Do you think *Jamie* talks in his sleep?"

"Silver will shut him up if he does," I said, hoping so, as I turned off the taps.

Jamie:

I tossed and turned in my bunk again, but tonight everyone was restless.

Derfel was singing under his breath in Welsh. The Australians chattered quietly. “Tomorrow at Mrs. C.’s?” I heard one of them say. I didn’t know any of them well enough to tell apart their accented voices in the dark.

“Too right,” another answered. “My turn to dance with Sergeant Lind.”

“She’s talking to the Jerries in the afternoon and we’re flying tomorrow night. We won’t even see her.”

“I can dream, can’t I?”

“Go ahead and dream,” said the first—probably Harry. “Flight Officer Pennyworth is mine.”

Meanwhile, Chip and Yorkie argued softly on the other side of the room. I couldn’t hear most of it, but it was about the German prisoners. If Cromwell was getting information out of them, he wasn’t sharing it. Our ground crew had gone over every inch of the captured German bomber and we’d all had a nosy inside the cockpit, but no one found any hidden secret messages or classified Luftwaffe radar gear. Or fresh code settings for a German cipher machine.

I needed another meeting with Ellen and Louisa and Mrs. Warner all together. Passing messages down the line while dancing in the pub or racing to climb into a Blenheim before an op was doing my head in.

Also, I was dogged by dread of Felix Baer’s warning.

Trap. Enigma.

A snare for B-Flight—not just me. Eighteen of us that I was responsible for.

Bill Yorke raised his voice. “If you ask me, the colored girl knew they were coming.”

“She knows how to transmit Morse,” Chip agreed. “And the old lady speaks German. They could have a radio hidden up there. They

could be sending messages in German to the bombers.”

“*Come bomb us, please,*” Ignacy put in sarcastically, and Derfel laughed.

I sat up in alarm. I had to nip this in the bud.

“Flying Officer Yorke, if anyone’s accused of careless talk, you’re going to be first in the queue for court martial,” I growled. “You’re the one who left German code transmissions on cigarette papers in the public bar.”

“*I did what?*” Bill Yorke cried. “I copied out the transmissions and turned them in to Intelligence, like I always do! Tex told me to get rid of the scribbling papers!”

“I said to burn ’em,” Chip protested. “Not leave them in an ashtray.”

Everybody went quiet. I couldn’t keep throwing threats at Yorkie, hoping one would make him start playing cricket with the rest of the side.

Give him something to do, Silver had said. He hadn’t said what.

Before I lost most of my old B-Flight in that November op, I’d never had trouble with my aircrews. But had I *always* leaned on my navigator to point me in the right direction as much as I did now? Was my civil war with Cromwell keeping me from solving my own command problems?

For a start, I could put an end to this stupid scrapping.

“Stow this nonsense about old women and kids being Nazi spies, and go to sleep,” I said. “Nothing happened. Volunteer McEwen found those codes and turned them in. She keeps mum about it, and if she can do it, so can we.”

As I said it, I suddenly knew how to take some of the edge off Bill Yorke.

I could put him in charge of Dougie—get him to keep Dougie’s chattering tongue in line. I’d have a quiet word in the morning. The wireless ops hung around together anyway; Chip and Yorkie were already wingers. Yorkie must have felt like I was nothing but a brand-new sprog bossing him about. It would do him good to earn the respect of the *real* sprogs.

It would take some of the pressure off me, too.

Ellen:

As long as they were chasing U-boats, Jamie's lads pulled together. Shut them up for a week of bad weather and they became a cloud of biting midgies.

B-Flight was scheduled for its first nighttime op since the Jerries landed. But they stopped by the Limehouse before their afternoon kip, no doubt hoping for a keek at so-called Sergeant Lind. She was away translating German that day, so they'd have to wait. The wireless ops all ganged together, chatting up Nan's mousy village lass Morag behind the bar, until she was blushing and getting orders wrong.

I saw Bill Yorke give Dougie Kerr a warning thump in the shoulder, and Dougie went red. Yorkie gave him a wee lecture.

It looked more like a superior officer dressing down a sprog than Yorkie's usual stirring up mutiny. I caught Jamie's eye, and he raised his glass ever so slightly. He was watching the wireless ops too. He still looked knackered. But not so *old* these days.

I wished I could take over his job for a day and have a go at whipping his lads into shape.

The wireless ops took their drinks and left the bar, crowding on stools among the rest of us lasses. Yorkie sat himself between Louisa and Phyllis, with his thigh pressed against Louisa and his arm over Phyllis's shoulder. Phyllis was such a flipping good girl she put up with it, but Louisa scooted her chair to get away from him.

"Colored gal's playin' hard to get," Chip Wingate drawled.

"Colored gal prefers Germans," said Bill Yorke. "Bats her eyelashes at 'em like she wants to get paid."

"Oi, set an example, Flying Officer Yorke," Jamie warned. "I'm counting on you."

Louisa stood, her hand quivering on her chair back.

She'd told me she'd blinked Morse code at Felix Baer. Yorkie was a wireless operator—she must be feart he'd noticed. She couldn't risk getting angry.

She moved to put Jane and the table between herself and

Yorke.

"I prefer musicians," she said.

That fetched a good laugh from the lads. I stood up to join her so she'd know I had her back. But Yorkie didn't move aside for me to pass.

"Gadgy pillock," I muttered, going round the table the other way.

Shaness. I'd used a Traveller word.

Nobody noticed. Or if they did, they didn't wonder why I'd used it. Ignacy Mazur, the Polish bloke, told Yorkie, "You will never win a lady by questioning her character."

Dougie Kerr laughed. Then he opened his flapping gob and said, "Mazur, mate, you're not qualified to give advice about girls."

They were all ready for a fight.

"Shut it, you blabber-mouthed Australian git!" snarled Derfel. "You blab about every flight, you blab about every transmission—you blabbed to Morag that you've taken an oath under the Official Secrets Act, what kind of a chat-up line is *that*?"

"I didn't *tell* her anything!" Dougie said, hurt. "I said I *couldn't* tell her anything. Anyway, leave it out, Yorkie already had a go at me earlier. *Careless talk costs lives*—I'm not daft!"

Chip said, "Taff's not sore about careless talk. He's sore because you're blabbing about him and Ignacy."

Silver said, "Aw, keep quiet, you stupid Yank."

"I'm *not* a Yank, you stupid Jew!"

Jamie swore—"Break it up! Silver! TEX!"—and Nan cried, "*Lads, lads!*" but Dougie blethered cheerfully: "A Scot's a Scot, a Pole's a Pole, a Taff's a Taff. So why isn't a Yank—"

Derfel growled, "I said *shut your gob, you Aussie prick*."

Chip and Bill swapped glances, then both turned back to look at Derfel.

Chip said, "A pansy—"

And Pimms all lost their heads.

"Oik!"

"Pom!"

"*Sheep-shagger!*"

"Yid!"

"Bloody *ENGLISH!*" Jamie roared at his best mate, and Chip and Derfel tumbled over the flagstones trying to beat each other's brains out.

Jamie and Silver dived after Chip. Ignacy went for Derfel. A tableful of glasses crashed to the floor. Phyllis shrieked and jumped up, knocking over her chair; Jane knocked over her sticks. Louisa and I stared. It was like we'd chucked a match into a tank of petrol.

Ignacy pulled Derfel off by the back of his collar. They fell into a guddle of broken glass and spilt beer, cursing in Welsh and Polish.

That wildcat Chip Wingate wouldn't stop. Jamie and Silver sat on him, but he kept fighting, and Adam Stedman piled in. They pinned him until he lay completely squashed, heaving angry breaths.

What a way to win a war, aye?

Poor Jamie looked up at us shocked women, me and Louisa and Jane and Phyllis by the fire, Nancy and Morag behind the bar. He glowed red to the tips of his ears.

"I'm—I—"

Nan Campbell stood agape with her hair bunching out of its grips. Never had I seen her so close to weeping.

Then Morag babbled the most gob-smacking propaganda-poster display of British bulldog spirit: "Och, it's to be expected. Boys will be boys."

God pity us, isn't that the exact blether of Dougie's that started off the stramash?

I'd suddenly had enough.

"To be expected! Tear up the place like a pack of wild dogs—it's to be expected?" I cried. "Shaness, *nothing's* to be expected! I didn't expect Louisa to talk so posh! We didn't expect the Luftwaffe to fly in waving white flags! No one expected we'd win the Battle of Britain! If everybody went on doing what people expected, I'd be selling pins and willow baskets door to door instead of hauling this lot about between their battles! And you, Miss Morag Torrie, you'd be looking down your neb at me for being a Traveller lass, instead of mooning over my ATS driver's badge and wishing you were old enough to join up! Everybody shoves their sixpences into that bar *expecting* to come back for another drink and *look at how many of them never come back!*"

I saw the shiver go through them all.

Morag's mouth hung open. Nancy Campbell pushed hair out of her eyes and whispered, "Whisht, Ellen, lass, don't say such things."

"Every other body says whatever they think!"

"And you're no' a tinker."

"Aye, so I am," I said. "Your bonny English WAAF shares her room with a filthy tinker."

Phyllis grabbed my hand and squeezed. "She's very clean, Mrs. Campbell," she said.

I pulled away from her in fury. "*Nan knows that.*"

Nancy turned about and armed herself with a heather broom, probably made and sold to her by a relative of mine, and a pan and a cardboard box.

"I hope you lads are all *ashamed of yourselves*," she said bitterly.

They looked as if they mostly were.

Jamie croaked, "Pass those here, Mrs. Campbell, and we'll tidy up for you."

He got to his feet and gave orders in a low voice. "Sort the mess and get back to base. The moon is full and we're flying tonight. None of you will drink another drop the day, and you'll not set foot in this place again until I've worked out how we'll make it up to Mrs. C. You're all banned."

Derfel helped Ignacy to get up. "I'll manage him," he said to Jamie.

Suddenly B-Flight were working together again. I suppose that wasn't to be expected, either.

Harry Morrow and Gavin Hamilton set to with the broom and the dustpan. David Silvermont and Adam Stedman picked up the table; Dougie Kerr and Bill Yorke squatted collecting broken glass. Now and then the English lads threw me curious glances, looking at me in a new way.

Chip Wingate got stiffly to his feet. He put a chair right and sat on it.

"Tex, get a move on. Help out or get out," Jamie barked.

Chip leaned over his knees in silence.

"Come back for him later," suggested Silver.

"Volunteer McEwen will drive you if you're too puffed to walk," said Jamie.

Everybody looked at me all at once for a moment.

Then they went back to work.

Louisa:

It was late when the Tilly pulled up at the Limehouse again with its gears screaming, and a few minutes later Ellen pounded up the stairs. She saw our light on under the door and didn't knock.

"Louisa, come and give us a hand. Oh—you're in your night things!" She looked me up and down. "We need another bod and you might have to go outside. Do you have boots? I'll get you Nan's wellies."

I pulled on a sweater and tucked my nightgown into a skirt. If 648 Squadron could do it, so could I. I already had on wool stockings because my legs were always cold, but thinking of Nan Campbell's wellies, which she kept in the lean-to outside the kitchen door, I pulled on another pair of socks.

"Windyedge is the most exciting place I have ever lived, which is saying something," Jane said, watching me jealously.

"Please, *please* don't go downstairs till I come back. *Please*. Here's the torch, make sure you take it if you need the loo." I kissed the top of her head.

"Take care," Jane called after me.

"You take care!"

Morag was washing up, her head lowered over the glasses.

Chip Wingate was *still there*.

He was snoring by the dead fire in Jane's comfortable chair. Nan stood there, nervously holding a jug of water in one hand and twisting her pinny with the other. Jamie Beaufort-Stuart, dressed for flying, slapped his rear gunner back and forth across the face with a wet dishcloth.

"Come on, mate—*come on*—"

Chip shifted in Jane's chair, trying to dodge the wet smacks.

"You're going to get the full jug in a moment," Jamie growled.

"Aw, take a hike, Scotty, lemme alone!" moaned his gunner.

Jamie looked up at me and Ellen. "He's still blind drunk and we're flying *in an hour*."

"Where's Silver?" I asked, pulling on Nan's boots.

"Doing his job putting together tonight's flight plan, and doing mine and checking out the kite, and making sure nobody notices Tex isn't around to do his. If we get him on his feet maybe we can shoogle him out to the Tilly with me on one side and you two on the other—"

Chip roused himself and said, "The gorgeous redhead's gonna give me a hand? Miracles do happen! An' the cute li'l darkie?"

Did either of us need to help this good-for-nothing?

Of course we needed to help *Jamie*.

"One more wisecrack and I'm pinning today's punch-up on you, Sergeant Chester Wingate," Jamie threatened.

He got Chip's arm over his shoulder. Bracing himself against the table, Jamie managed to get them both to their feet. They were about the same height, but Chip was heavyset. Ellen slipped herself beneath Chip's other arm and he laughed.

"Oh, I like this—"

"Stow it, you clot," barked Jamie.

Ellen said grimly, "Louisa, you'll have to help."

I took a deep breath.

But I did it. I slid in next to her, my arm around her waist, and hung on to Chip's wrist where it dangled over my shoulder.

"Get the door, Mrs. C.," Jamie grunted. "What were you thinking, to let him get shot up like this!"

"You left him here! You should have carried him out before, when the lads could have helped!" Nan Campbell gasped. "He's never flying in this state!"

"If I don't get him in the air tonight he'll be court-martialed! And probably so will I, come to think of it."

"Don't you fret, Tex is much less likely to cause trouble this way," Ellen told Nan. "He can sleep in the air."

I saw Jamie glance at the coins in the ceiling. Nan followed his gaze, her face pale.

"In my pocket—" Chip tilted his head. "Go on, Scotty, give her some of the funny money. Sixpence, a tanner, is that what you call it? A tanner for my next pint—"

With a heavy sigh, balanced beneath Chip's arm and not daring to tempt fate, Jamie managed to reach into Chip's trouser pocket and somehow came up with a sixpence. He gave it to Mrs. Campbell.

"You keep that safe for him."

Ellen:

Nan held the doors, and the rest of us heaved Chip through and slung him in the back of the Tilly. He was away with the fairies as he hit the floor.

"You'd better come," I told Louisa.

"Ride up front with Ellen," Jamie added. "I'll keep an eye on Texas Sunshine."

"What about Jane!" Louisa objected.

"I'll look in on her," said Nancy quickly. "Just this once. Of course I will."

Under the bright full moon I didn't need headlamps—not that they're worth much in wartime, narrowed to slits with black paint. Louisa offered her passport at the barrier, but Nobby saw her too often to care; he rolled his eyes and waved us through.

Jamie coaxed and scolded his rat-arsed gunner all the way, but Louisa cracked away with me just as she'd done when Felix Baer took us for hostages.

"What are tinkers?" Louisa asked. "Is it like being a Gypsy?"

"Aye, a mite like that. My folk are Travellers," I said shortly. "Tinker is what the gadgies call us. That would be like folk calling you a darkie—you wouldn't call yourself that, would you? *Filthy tinker*."

"You must have stories!" Louisa said.

"But no address. No home to go to. People don't like that—they think it makes you shifty. Lazy. Outsiders, not to be trusted."

"We were outsiders too," Louisa agreed. "Me and my English mum and Jamaican dad. We didn't fit anyone's rules, and it was hard being out and about together. But we *loved* being together. You have family to go to, as well, don't you? Doesn't that count?"

We'd reached the barracks. I pulled up and jumped out. Louisa was close behind me as I opened the back of the van, and David Silvermont pounded across the moonlit airfield to join us.

"Got him?" Silver demanded.

Best Jamie could do was make Chip sit up, but he wouldn't get

out of the Tilly.

“Goddamn it, Jamie!” Silver exclaimed. “He isn’t suited up!”

“I know it,” Jamie said grimly. He sounded done in. “Get his gear and we’ll drive him to the plane.”

We couldn’t get Chip into his flight suit, either. No amount of bawling in his earhole could stir him. Silver looked at the luminous dial of his watch.

“Jamie, we take off in ten minutes. For God’s sake. Leave him. It’s not your fault. We’re on fishing-fleet escort; we won’t be taking headings and we can manage without a gunner. You can work the radio from the pilot’s seat.”

“The start-up crew will notice if only two of us get in. And if my gunner gets court-martialed, I’ll be in for it too. If we could just get him into the plane!”

Louisa knelt on the floor of the Tilly by the slumbering Texan, holding his flight suit.

“Hey,” she said slowly.

She sat and hauled Nan Campbell’s boots off her feet. A moment later she began to climb into Chip Wingate’s flight suit. By the time she’d got her legs in and struggled to pull it up over her shoulders, I jumped up to help. In another second Silver was giving us a hand too.

Every one of us wanted to save Jamie’s skin. We didn’t give a toss about Chip Wingate.

“No, no, *no*,” Jamie objected. “Not *Louisa*.”

“Why not Louisa!” I said. “We’ll leave Tex to sleep it off! He’ll be all right under blankets and canvas.”

“No!”

“We’ll have to swap her back the second we’re on the ground,” said Silver.

“I’ll wait here,” I said. “I’ll drive up to the plane when you land and she can hop back in the van, and we’ll unload Texas Sunshine at the barracks door. No one will notice it wasn’t him with you the whole time.”

“Tomorrow you can pretend he fainted on the flight back and had to be carried to bed,” said Louisa, and Silver and I burst out laughing.

Jamie:

Were they all absolutely bonkers?

Louisa thought we were likely to fly straight into a German deathtrap sometime in the coming day or two, and here she was trying to stow away on our next op?

I took her by the hands as we crouched on the van's wooden floor next to my snoring wireless operator/rear gunner. We knelt facing each other; I hadn't put on my gauntlets, and her grip was firm.

"Louisa, you can't come," I said. "I've got enough on my plate, and I'm not going to let you risk your life for this tosser." I nodded over my shoulder toward Chip. "He's not worth it. Don't be a martyr."

"Why in the world would I do it for *him*!" she exclaimed hotly. "Are you mad? *I want* to do it. I want to *so much*. I want to fly. I loved it before. And—"

She spat the words under her breath. "And no one will let me fly like you, because I am a girl and what they told my dad—*not of pure European descent*."

Before I could protest again, she added quickly, "Well, also, I want to help you." She sucked in a breath. "I can practice receiving Morse code! I can listen to the radio for you!"

I gave a gasp of a laugh. She wouldn't even know how to turn the radio on. But she was *so keen*.

"You could take me instead of Louisa," Ellen put in persuasively. "Only I'd be sick again, and I couldn't receive Morse code. You'd let me come, aye? You'd let *me*."

"Yes, but—that's not fair. You've left home. You're responsible for yourself."

"So have I," said Louisa. "So am I."

As long as we didn't get shot at, she'd be fine, and no one would know Chip hadn't gone with us. Still—I shook my head. "You don't need to be involved."

"I'm already involved. You know how much." She laughed.

If anyone found out, I'd be in bigger trouble than she would.

"Oh, let her come if she wants to that badly," said Silver. "It's not a bombing run."

I sat back on my heels, throwing my hands in the air in surrender. If Silver was going to side with the girls, I was doomed.

"Cheer up!" he said as he climbed in next to us. "Think how much trouble she'll save, not how much she'll make! Louisa never makes any trouble."

Ellen shut us all in the back of the van.

"You'd better have another pair of socks," I told Louisa. "Or two. Silver, can you spare some socks? If we each give her a layer, no one will end up with frostbite."

Louisa laughed nervously as we dragged off our boots and passed her our socks in the dark.

"What—"

"You'll get Tex's chocolate ration, too!" Silver exclaimed. "Make sure you eat it before you take off, so it doesn't go to waste if we—"

"Shut up, mate," I interrupted. "We won't. Not this time."

Ellen gave Louisa her pullover. Outside it was colder than it had been on Christmas Day. The poor wee lass could hardly move by the time we'd packed her in woolens and stuffed a dozen Ever-Hot bags between the layers, but it helped bulk out Chip's flight suit. With the legs and sleeves rolled up, it wasn't too bad—he wasn't any taller than me.

Then we helped Louisa into his padded gauntlets and life vest, and finished off the disguise with his helmet and mask. She had her own oxygen and a microphone this time. You couldn't see anything of her face but her eyes.

So when Ellen pulled up by Pimms Section's lead Blenheim, where the ground crew were still refueling, three suited airmen climbed from the back of the Tilly.

Standing next to the plane I knew we never had a chance of getting Chip into it. There was no way we could have lifted him onto the wing and through the rear hatch. We struggled enough getting Louisa up there, in Chip's flight suit and Nan Campbell's wellie boots, and she was lighter and more cooperative than Chip. I leaned over to cram my top half through the hatch behind her so I could show her where to stow her parachute and plug in her oxygen.

"The rear gunner's also the wireless operator," I told her. "Sit at

the radio for takeoff—once we're in the air, hop into the gun turret if you want to see out. When I get the hydraulics switched on, you can make the gunner's chair go up and down by twisting the handles." I pointed. "It'll move the gun, too; careful you don't hit the firing button by accident. You're connected to the intercom so you can talk to me and Silver, and you'll be able to hear the radio, but you can't transmit to the other planes. Let me know if anything bothers you!"

"Do I have to do something?" She wagged her fingers. She could hardly bend them in Chip's gauntlets.

I laughed. "Don't worry—you're just here to be a third bod. But if we come under fire, *get out of the turret*. The rear gunner sticks out like a sore thumb, and you'll be a sitting duck. Silver's having a quiet word about you with Ignacy. He and Derfel will be flying right behind us, and they'll cover you. I've got a gun of my own up front. You make sure you keep your head down."

I'd just have to stay high if we ran into antiaircraft fire—or low if we met an enemy plane. I couldn't risk getting shot up with Louisa in the back.

I think she knew that.

"You can still change your mind," I said quietly. "It's five minutes till engine start."

"Rules are made to be broken," she said. "I'm not going to change my mind."

Part 4

ACES

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Louisa:

This time I hadn't put a sixpence in the ceiling—or even my secret penny. I didn't let myself think about it. I was not a fool-fool country gal.

The engines roared and the Blenheim bumped over the airfield. I couldn't see the takeoff, but I knew when we left the ground because the jouncing stopped. I wrestled myself up into the clear Perspex gunner's turret. There wasn't any point worrying about *anything* for the next few hours, and the beauty of the sea and sky in silver moonlight and blue clouds was like a fairy world, a dream world. I was amazed by the cold night sky, the clouds filled with luminous light and shadow as we rose through them, the full moon dipping in and out of view, stars frozen still overhead. I wasn't afraid of anything.

Jamie's laughing voice came over the intercom.

"Rear gunner, you're making a lot of noise. Keep it down."

I was humming "Rhapsody in Blue." Just the way Mummy used to hum without thinking about it! The sky was *wonderful*.

And the cold—the *cold*! It was *unreal*. Even after three years in England, I was not ready for this kind of cold. After ten minutes I had to grip the sides of the turret to stop my body from shuddering. My toes and fingers began to ache. Frost began to fur the inside of the plane—all the struts and rivets and wires grew velvety white coats. When I breathed, the inside of my mask was slick with a thin layer of ice. The Perspex near my head became foggy, froze, and fogged again.

I kicked my feet and clapped my gauntleted hands to warm them up. Jamie and Silver had both given me their extra socks. I was bundled up with heated Ever-Hot bags. What could anyone do if I complained? I *couldn't* complain. We were in the sky over the North Sea.

Now and then Silver gave Jamie a heading or a height. Through the crackle and fuzz of the headset I could hear people talking in the other B-Flight planes. Nobody was singing in German or sending

coded messages. The cold, beautiful sky was quiet in its garment of clouds and moonlight.

I don't know how long we'd been flying, but after a bit I wasn't getting moments of moonlight anymore, and I could only see a star if I looked straight up. Then there were no stars, either. Clouds rose all around, blue and black and mysterious, more shadow than light.

Then there wasn't any light. It was all the close darkness of fog.

"All B-Flight aircraft, this is Pimms Leader," Jamie called. "Better turn back, lads. I don't like this cloud."

I heard protests from the other airmen. Ignacy's Polish accent stood out. "A good cloud is the Blenheim bomber's best friend!"

"You're not hedgehopping over the Netherlands anymore, and it isn't summer. Remember A-Flight in the fog in Shetland? We've got too many sprogs flying tonight—no offense, Stedman, but most of your lads are just as fresh as mine. North Sea ice and fog are no conditions for new pilots."

"Righto, Pimms Leader," called Adam Stedman, Madeira's leader, in agreement. "But I'm not a sprog. I'm on instruments."

"So am I. You and I can complete the op ourselves," said Jamie. "The rest of you head back now. Get beneath the cloud if you can; watch out for engine and airframe ice. And spread out. Don't try to stay together. I don't want any collisions."

I couldn't see any horizon—it was all murk.

Jamie had said to let him know if anything bothered me, and something did.

"If you can fly on instruments, can't the Luftwaffe also?" I asked.

"Someone in a crate like ours could, yes," he answered lightly. "A bomber could. But they're unlikely to send any Messers out into this soup. Fighters have to see you to shoot at you. Don't worry."

I tried not to worry. It was smooth flying. But if a mountain or another plane suddenly loomed in front of us, we'd never see it.

Jamie:

“Just checking we’re on parallel headings,” Adam Stedman came in over the static. “And that you’re above me. I can’t see you.”

“Affirm to both. And I can’t see you either.”

“Give that de-icer another pump, would you?” Silver said. “Those engines sound rough.”

“Aye. Wish we could get out of this muck.”

“Shall we try a different heading?”

“I don’t want to run into Stedman,” I said. “I’ll go higher and see if we can clear the cloud. We’ll give it fifteen minutes and reassess. I can’t believe any Jerry pilot’s out here in this frozen cotton wool trying to bomb a fishing boat. They can’t see what’s down there any more than we can.”

Ugh, Louisa could hear everything we said. She wasn’t a worrier, but I was pretty sure she was worried.

“You all right back there, rear gunner?” I said over the intercom.

“A bit cold,” she admitted.

“Can you feel your toes?”

“Yes, and I wish I couldn’t!”

Brave lass! “No you don’t. If they hurt they’ll be all right.” I felt I owed her more of an apology. “I’m sorry about the clouds. I wouldn’t have invited you if I’d known you wouldn’t see anything.”

“It was lovely before,” she said staunchly.

We flew on. The seconds crept by. It felt like an hour by the time fifteen minutes had ticked off. Well, we’d given it our best shot; we’d never find anything out here tonight, and neither would anyone else.

“That’s it, Stedman, let’s go,” I said. “This is a washout. Hold your height. And take care.”

“See you back in Scotland,” crackled Stedman’s voice.

“Heading two-zero-five,” said Silver.

I began to turn, eyes glued to the instrument panel. Poor Louisa probably couldn’t tell which way was up. Outside was nothing but

suffocating cloud and the faint, pale glow of the frosted airframe.

The flight home seemed longer than it should have been. It wasn't; I could tell by the clock. But I began to feel I was flying in circles, even though I *knew* I was holding a steady course.

"Aren't we there yet?" I asked Silver.

"Give it another minute on this heading," he answered, and there was strain in his voice, too.

Time crawled on. The luminous clock dial told me so.

Louisa dared to ask, "Are we lost?"

"No, we're not lost," I assured her. "But it's not fun to fly in."

"Oh," Louisa said. She didn't sound reassured.

"Heading one-nine-zero," said Silver.

Louisa didn't say anything else. There wasn't anything she could do to help.

"Can't you give me a direct course?" I asked.

"No, in case we overshoot and fly into a mountain," Silver answered. "We don't want to descend below safety height. Not in cloud like this—one-nine-zero—"

I banked slowly to port.

Louisa's voice yelled in my ears.

"Kingsleap Light!"

I saw it too, far below, a brilliant green ray piercing the clouds for one second. I spiraled down over the lighthouse, knowing I wouldn't hit anything out at sea. The cloud was so low it sent fingers wreathing around the lighthouse tower. But we could see white foam against the black waves below, crashing on the Kingsleap Rocks.

Louisa's voice came urgently in my headset.

"Hold green light await fog!"

"What?" I asked automatically. "Hold green light?"

A second later I realized why the words were familiar.

HOLD GREEN LIGHT AWAIT FOG

"Await fog"! It's an instruction!" Louisa cried. "They always say 'green light' when they mean Kingsleap—it means wait for a fog and then have another go at Windyedge!"

She'd cracked it.

"What the—?" Silver asked.

We were so close to Windyedge we ought to have seen the

flashing beacon at the end of the runway. It wasn't on, because I hadn't called in yet. Presumably it was on earlier, when the rest of B-Flight came back. I couldn't see the sea cliffs. If I left the lighthouse I would have to climb into fog to be sure I didn't hit them.

But an enemy bomber wouldn't have to worry about hitting the cliffs if he oriented himself by the lighthouse and stayed high as he came in over the airfield.

"There may be a Luftwaffe bandit heading this way," I said to Silver. "We'd better do a bit of a patrol. There's plenty of fuel left. If anyone asks, we'll give credit to our ace wireless operator overhearing enemy transmissions."

I called Adam Stedman to join me, and I called to the radio room on the ground and told them not to light up, and to man the anti-aircraft guns. Finally, for Louisa's benefit, I said, "Hold on back there. Could be a false alarm..."

Adam came rumbling out of the cloud and flew right round the base of the lighthouse, making sure we could see each other. Then we both flew in long ellipses, one of us on each end of the curve, out to sea and back, peering into nothing.

It felt as though time had stopped still. Maybe we were already dead and this was purgatory, circling in the frozen dark forever, adjusting the angle of bank on the long turns, looking for an enemy that might not exist.

"There!"

Silver and Louisa yelled together.

It was a Junkers 88 Luftwaffe bomber, a hulking black shape caught in the green loom of the lighthouse beam.

"Get out of that turret!" I yelled at Louisa.

Louisa:

But I didn't—if I was going to die in an air battle I wanted to see it.

The Luftwaffe plane came out of the fog below us, a black shadow bathed in green light. I couldn't hear the German engines' telltale throb because of my headset and our own engines.

"I'm going in," called Adam Stedman, and I saw sizzling red tracks through the air made by his firing guns.

The lighthouse beam turned. I couldn't see Adam's Blenheim or the German plane.

"Are you out?" Jamie called.

"Yes, on you go—"

We dived. *I* couldn't tell where the target was, but Silver barked directions to Jamie as if he could see in the dark.

The Blenheims took turns heckling the Luftwaffe bomber. When Jamie swooped down, all I could see was the frosted Perspex of the turret, glowing red as the inside of a pomegranate. I felt the dive and heard the guns in my stomach.

We swooped back up, avoiding the swinging lighthouse beam. Below us, red and blue light flickered as the Madeira Blenheim and the Ju-88 fired at each other. I saw a burst of orange flame, but it instantly went dark again.

"He's away!" came Adam Stedman's triumphant yell. "I think I got an engine. He wasn't expecting an attack, was he!"

"Think he'll risk climbing into the cloud and bombing Windyedge on one engine?" Jamie asked sharply.

"Don't know—hope not—well, *I* bloody well wouldn't if it was me. It's a long way back to Norway on one iced-up engine."

Over the sea cliffs I saw a warm yellow glow like a great big firefly in the dark. It was a window in the Limehouse, whose blackout curtains were pulled back. The light blazed boldly into the war-torn night at two o'clock in the morning.

"*Bloody hell,*" cursed Adam Stedman. "That'll tell them where to aim, if they're still flying."

"Someone's scared of the dark," Jamie muttered. "I bet I know

who.”

He radioed Windyedge and told them to ring the Limehouse and get Mrs. Campbell to “close her bloody curtains.”

Only the double bedrooms faced southeast. Mrs. Campbell would be the first to get in trouble, but it wasn’t her bedroom showing light. Miss Lind’s room had the big bay window.

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Jamie:

Stedman and I patrolled for another twenty minutes before we landed. But the bomber didn't come back, and finally I got Windyedge to light the beacon for us. There wasn't much gap between cloud and land, but we could see the flashing red light at the end of the runway.

It wasn't my best landing. But we'd done a hell of a night's work.

"I hope you haven't turned into a block of ice," I called to Louisa as we bounced over the frozen field.

"I'm warm as toast!" she lied through chattering teeth.

Wonderful Louisa!

HOLD GREEN LIGHT AWAIT FOG

What if she hadn't been along, putting the puzzle pieces together?

We'd have landed, and the Ju-88 would have seen the beacon and followed us in.

All the B-Flight Blenheims would have been lined up on the ground beneath the bombs.

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Ellen:

I spent most of the night worrying that Texas Sunshine would freeze to death in the back of the Tilly, so I sat freezing with him to make sure he didn't.

It was fearsome to watch the haar sea mist roll in and the moonlight disappear, and after the first planes came back, to spend a terrible hour waiting for the section leaders—and, *God pity her*, for Louisa. I heard the engines, Adam and Jamie flying round and round above us out at sea, as if it were too foggy for them to land. They circled most of another hour. No one outside the radio room knew what was happening. The beacon stayed dark, and Adam and Jamie stayed in the air.

Then came the battle over the lighthouse. You couldn't see anything but flashes in the clouds, like distant lightning.

And then, hurrah, *hurrah*, the beacon winking on, and the planes roaring in with their landing lights shining, safe as houses.

I fired up the Tilly and raced to meet Jamie's Blenheim trundling over the frozen grass. I got there before any other body and was halfway up the wing myself when the crew tumbled out. I hugged that rear gunner as tight as I could hug, and felt wee arms in deep padding hugging me back. *God be thanked*.

"All right, lads?" I asked, when we all had our feet on the ground.

"Not dead yet," Jamie answered cheerfully. "Give us a smoke, lass."

"Got the shakes again?"

"Don't be silly. Takes more than a mite of cloud and a few squirts of machine gun fire to make me lose my nerve."

I lit him a cigarette anyway, and he gave it to Louisa, who I'm guessing had never smoked in her life. Clever lass passed it to Silver straightaway—she knew she'd blow her cover if she started choking and spluttering over her first cigarette. Silver took a drag, handed it back to Jamie, and went to open the van.

"We'd better get this gunner to bed, don't you think?" he said.

“His toes might be a bit cold, and he’s in no state for debriefing.”

“Right you are!” said Jamie.

Chip was still snoring as Jamie and Silver carried him into their barracks. Louisa stayed out of the way and rode home with me on the back of my bike as Jamie and Silver headed to ops to be grilled about their flight.

“Give that Swiss milkmaid a bollocking for leaving her light on” was the last thing Jamie told us.

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Louisa:

Scolding Elisabeth Lind for her blackout violation wasn't the first thing on my mind as I limped up through the inky stairwell in the Limehouse. My feet had never been so cold in my entire life.

I stayed in the bathroom for nearly two hours, sitting on the chilly linoleum in the dark, rubbing my feet with a towel and crying as quietly as I could. The bathroom was safe; no one would come in during the night. The hot water was off till seven a.m., and the loo was in its own closet next door. If I made no noise, no one would notice me.

I kept an ear out for Jane in case she got up, but by four o'clock in the morning I was so tired I thought I might be able to go to bed and sleep off the rest of the pain. I dragged myself out of the bathroom and started down the passage to Room Number Five.

As I crossed the landing at the top of the stairwell, I heard a noise in the hall below me like a trapdoor closing.

I panicked.

How had that woman got herself downstairs without me noticing? Not again!

The rest of the house was silent and dark. I knew for a fact Nancy Campbell finished counting in the landing Blenheims over three hours ago.

I put one burning foot down on the top step, then hesitated as I realized what the sound downstairs had been. There was a big medieval wooden bench in the hall with storage under the seat. The sound I'd heard was the lid closing. I didn't think Jane could stand and lift that lid herself.

Then I heard the door of the telephone cupboard open, and I could tell that someone was sweeping the beam of an electric torch about inside it. I waited, listening. The torch went dark; I couldn't hear footsteps, but a minute later the door of Mrs. Campbell's office snicked open.

Whoever was down there was moving so furtively that I wondered if we were being burgled.

But the creeper seemed too familiar with the place to be a sneak thief—perhaps it was Nan checking windows after the blackout violation. The office door closed again. There wasn't any more light. The person was being very cautious.

Footsteps came treading deliberately up the staircase.

I took another step down and grabbed the rail, gasping with the shock of the sudden weight on my feet.

Whoever it was must have known now that I was there. If I tried to run back to the bathroom or my room, it would just look suspicious. Even ridiculous. So I sat down at the top of the stairs and waited.

Three-quarters of the way up, the stalker stopped and lit a match.

"Oh," said Miss Lind when she saw me.

For a moment our eyes were level.

Hers were clear amber, like dark honey, in the matchlight. She shook the match to put it out before it burned her fingers.

"Hello," Miss Lind said softly.

"What are you looking for?" I asked.

"What are you doing up?" she fired back.

Her pretty vixen's face lit again as she struck another match and touched the flame to a cigarette. She vanished into the dark once more as the match went out. She took a quiet drag on her cigarette; the red glow of its burning tip wasn't enough to light her face.

"I was in the bathroom, not sneaking around in the dark!" I objected. "And you had your light on before, which anyone could see from ten miles away," I added in accusation. "There was a Luftwaffe bomber out there!"

She made an alarmed noise like a cat's hiss.

"I heard the engines," she whispered. "I thought it was our own planes coming back! I knew the Blenheims were circling, and I thought they couldn't land because of the fog! I put on the light for *them*, not for the Luftwaffe—it's *terrible*, waiting on the ground and not being able to help!"

"It was jolly careless of you if you're working for Intelligence!"

"I know it. Cromwell chewed me out on the telephone and said he'd report me." I heard her give a sharp, snorting sigh through her nose. "*I'm sorry*. But I thought if they could see my light, they'd know which way to come in. I *had* to do it."

"I know," I said. I understood why. "You're Jamie's sister."

She was silent for a moment.

I added quickly, "Don't tell me your real name. I don't want to use it by accident."

"I wasn't going to." She drew on her cigarette. It glowed red and faded again before she asked, "What gave me away?"

"Ellen told me."

"Thank heavens you didn't work it out yourself," she said. "It's *hell* not being able to speak to Jamie in case someone notices the family resemblance. It's such a stupid charade, trying to keep the Germans happy, when they won't tell me anything anyway. Although I suppose it is good practice."

Miss Lind lit another match. She cupped it in her hands, holding the cigarette between her fingers, and came the rest of the way up the stairs. She sat down beside me on the top step before the match went out. I felt her shuffling about in the dark as she reached into the pocket of her silk dressing gown. "Would you like a cigarette?"

"No, thank you," I said. "What were you hunting for downstairs?"

She returned fire just the way she did earlier. "How do you know my light was on?"

Oh, *bother*. If I'd been in bed when I was supposed to, with our own blackout curtains properly drawn, I shouldn't have been able to see her window.

"I'll tell you if you tell me," I offered.

"You first, then," she said.

"I went flying with Jamie."

She took a deep breath.

"All right."

She spoke practically in a whisper. I could feel her close beside me, a warm bundle of rustling inky silk in the inky dark.

"I told you Felix Baer doesn't trust me. I know you haven't been able to do anything about it—how could you, really? But I can't just come clean with Cromwell, either. I also have to answer to my department in Intelligence, and the German navigator—Dietrich Althammer—told me the most extraordinary thing today. He accused Cromwell of using a coding machine that Baer brought here in November. He says Baer had no authorization to give it to Cromwell, and Althammer and Moritz want to convince Cromwell to turn it over to the correct authorities. My department. *Except...*"

She paused. I didn't say anything.

"Except Cromwell hasn't got it. Cromwell doesn't know anything about it. Yet the Germans think someone's using it."

I kept my lips pressed together.

"The thing is, my department has been *expecting* this particular machine. The German navy and Luftwaffe have used these things since the beginning of the war, since *before* the war, to generate code for the messages they send each other about their attack plans. Intelligence has an entire operation trying to crack the codes these machines generate, and they can't do it. Coastal Defense hears German wireless communications flying about *all the time*, but no one can decode any of it. We already know how their machines work. But if we could capture one and get the settings to go along with it, we'd have a chance of cracking their code. Not just in the North Sea. All over the Atlantic. One machine, and a few pages of paper.

"And Odysseus was supposed to bring us both," she finished. "But the paperwork was destroyed when the airfield here was bombed, and the machine never turned up."

The paperwork was destroyed when Windyedge was bombed.

"Oh crumbs," I breathed. "I didn't know—none of us knew."

"Didn't know what?" Miss Lind asked carefully.

"That it was the only one!"

None of us realized how special it was. Not *really*.

"Does that mean—" She caught her breath.

"Cromwell doesn't have it," she said. "You have it. *You have it!*"

Her excited voice didn't get louder—it dwindled to a sharp, hissed whisper. "*Who's 'us,' anyway?*"

"Jamie and Ellen. And Jane." I rushed to get the confession over with. "Jamie picks up the code and Ellen drops it off here. I decode it with the settings Felix Baer left. Jane translates the German. Then we know where the U-boats will be."

"*Settings!*" She laughed wildly. "*You have the settings!*"

"We copied the leaflets," I whispered. "I made copies before Jamie turned them in."

"Proper little secret society!" she gasped. "My God! Do you know how many scores of codebreakers are frantically trying to crack this technology?"

"No," I answered, still whispering. "How could we?"

Elisabeth Lind drew a shaky breath on her cigarette, tapped off

the ash, and brushed it beneath the coconut matting on the stairs.

"Ellen said to give you the machine," I admitted. "It's—it's *contaminated*. We've run out of settings, and the Germans know we have it and they're laying a trap for our planes."

"How in *blazes* do you know that?" she exclaimed.

"Felix Baer told me."

"Of course he did." She was breathless with excitement. "I am most impressed."

"I wanted to help," I said, feeling idiotic.

"You did. You have." She laughed again. "*You have. You are.* How were you to know there wasn't a stolen Enigma machine in every RAF base in Britain? *Jamie* might have guessed, but *you* weren't to know. At any rate—" Her cigarette glowed. "At any rate, now we have one!"

"Shall I fetch it for you?" I asked. "It's in Jane's wardrobe."

"*Ah—!*" She hesitated. Then she said reluctantly, "No. No, not just now, not at four in the morning. It's as safe there as anyplace, for the moment. It will take a bit of work to ship it to the proper Intelligence boffins. It would be jolly bad luck if another bomb dropped on it." Her voice fell to a whisper again. "But I would love to see it."

"Come visit us tomorrow," I invited her.

Never had I been so glad to climb in over the foot of the bed in Room Number Five and curl up next to the old woman I was here to look after. Jane's soft, purring snore seemed like the quietest sound I'd ever heard. I was still cold and my feet still hurt, and my confession to Sergeant Elisabeth Lind hadn't untangled the knots in my stomach. I didn't know what *Falle Enigma* was going to be; the German prisoners were still locked in the limekilns; the Luftwaffe bombers would come back.

But as I lay in the dark next to Jane I still felt sure I was in the safest place in the house.

I slept nearly till permitted hours the next day, and woke to find Jane pottering about in one of her fur coats. I sat up in bed. It was just gone eleven o'clock in the morning; the gas fire glowed warmly, and the windows gleamed with a dull, pale light I'd never seen before.

"It's snowing," Jane said. "It has been coming down all morning. Nancy lit our fire early, entirely for your benefit, I believe,

and she has even brought up a pot of tea. She says the snow is halfway to her knees already! When did you come in?"

"Snowing!" I exclaimed, scrambling for the window. "*Snowing!*"

I'd never seen proper snow. In London we got sleet or sometimes sooty slush. The high moors around Windyedge had been white all winter, but this was the first picture-postcard snow I'd ever seen up close. I threw the window open and leaned into the sill over the books.

"It *smells* different!"

I scooped snow off the sill and licked it. A flurry of wet flakes gusted into my face and the Scotch pines sighed.

"It *sounds* different!"

Jane laughed at me. "Shut the window," she said. "The fire is on."

"Can the Blenheims fly in snow?" I exclaimed.

"I shouldn't think so," said Jane.

"I told Miss Lind about the Enigma machine," I confessed.

Elisabeth Lind came in for five minutes, carefully avoiding Nancy Campbell. She was so excited it made her *weep*. She gave a little sob as she opened the shining wooden lid of the cipher machine, and another as she pressed a key and a lamp came on.

"I've never touched one," she whispered. "Show me how the code works." I opened my exercise book to the first message I'd decoded, and showed her.

"It's so *beautiful*," she said. "Don't call it contaminated just because they want to trick you. It's the purest piece of machinery I've ever seen. It has to do what it's told."

I know it sounds mad, but I knew what she meant.

"When the snow is gone I shall have to send it away," she said wistfully. "I'm a bit envious of you getting to *really use* it."

The 648 Squadron airmen spent the day digging out Blenheims and clearing the runway, and the ground crew paraded up the lane to clear it as far as the main road. Ellen was busy hauling spades and soldiers; the Tilly rattled on tires wound up in chains. I kept running to the window to try to see what was going on, and just before it got dark Jane insisted I run outside. She sat in the bar where Mrs. Campbell could keep an eye on her, while I borrowed Mrs. Campbell's boots again and went down to the harbor to look at the snow falling on the cliffs and in the sea. My feet seemed back to

normal, thank goodness.

Low gold winter sunlight streamed through the southeast windows when I woke up the next morning, lighting corners of the room and casting shadows behind the furniture. The radio played while Jane poked about in the top dresser drawers, hunting for something. I jumped up to help.

“Oh, just a clean handkerchief!” she told me. “I can’t find a single one.”

“I washed them all yesterday. They’re on the drying rack by the bathtub. I’ll fetch one—but it won’t be ironed yet, you know! Do sit down—I don’t like to leave you on your feet.”

“I can manage being on my feet in this room by myself perfectly well, as you know.”

“All the same!”

I made her sit. I darted down the passage, stepped into the bathroom, and switched on the light.

The whole world seemed to explode.

It was a roar louder than being inside a Blenheim in the air, louder than standing next to a Messerschmitt 109 starting its engines. It was an explosion of thunder so suffocating I couldn’t hear my own shriek. The light overhead flickered out. The house shook. The floor beneath my feet shook. All I could think was that it was an earthquake, as once happened when Mummy and I were hanging out washing in our Kingston garden and we were both knocked off our feet—nothing else I ever felt could make a house tremble. I pressed my back against the bathroom wall, waiting for the earth to stop moving.

When the world set itself aright, I tore back to Room Five, where I’d left Jane sitting in her nightgown listening to *Music While You Work* on the wireless.

The radio was dead and she was lying on the floor.

She had jumped up when the thundering started. The shaking hadn’t knocked her over—it just startled her so much she lost her balance.

She was doubled over between the armchair and the bed, whimpering. She had taken all her weight on her right hand as she threw it out ahead of her to break her fall.

It was as if she’d stepped into a time machine and come out twenty years older.

She cried and sobbed. She didn’t cooperate when I tried to help

her sit up. I coaxed and pleaded and finally scolded. That made her whimper in a new and different way, whiny and sniveling, which shocked me. Finally I managed to make her roll onto her side—and gaped in horror when I saw that the last three fingers of her right hand were bent sideways.

But it was her wrist, not her fingers, that she grabbed at with her other hand. She cradled the hurt hand against her chest, moaning. I thought she'd broken her arm.

I was either going to have to leave her to get help, or yell my lungs out to make someone hear me.

“Help! Help! Ellen! Phyllis! Nan!”

I'd left our door open, and Elisabeth Lind came flying into the dusty sunlight of our room wearing nothing but a fancy French silk bra and knickers, and one very ordinary darned wool stocking that was part of her WAAF uniform. She'd been getting dressed. She was not the least bit embarrassed. She knew what to do.

“Stop moving her about,” she told me sharply. “Mrs. Warner, can you hear me? Did you hit your head? No? Ah, thank goodness —”

“My wrist—*mein Arm ist gebrochen*—ah—”

“Shh—no German.”

With Miss Lind on one side and me on the other, we helped Jane to sit. She moaned again as Miss Lind examined her hand. Her twisted fingers were horrible.

“I don't think these are broken,” Miss Lind said cheerfully. “The same thing happened to one of my brothers—well, very nearly—and when we rushed him to the doctor's it turned out they were only dislocated. May I?”

I could not look. I held Jane tightly, and Sergeant Elisabeth Lind straightened those fingers out all by herself.

“Can you bend them?” she asked kindly, and Jane could, a little. “Good. And the wrist—can you move it?”

Miss Lind held her own hand palm to palm against Jane's, their fingers interlocked. She rocked Jane's hand gently back and forth and side to side.

“I don't think you've broken a thing, Mrs. Warner,” said Miss Lind. “I think the wrist is just a sprain. But it will all hurt a good deal while everything mends. We ought to bind these fingers together and wrap up your wrist.”

“But I won't be able—” Jane sobbed.

And I thought of a hundred things she would not be able to do, just without those three fingers, never mind her wrist. Playing piano duets was the least of it. She wouldn't be able to dress herself; go to the toilet; put on shoes; *use her sticks*. She wouldn't be able to walk independently, or sit down on her own, or stand up again.

"How shall we get you off the floor?" Miss Lind mused. "I don't think we can lift you."

"If I put this arm around Louisa's shoulder and you help on the other side, I think we can manage," Jane whispered.

I was so relieved to hear her speaking sensible English without tears that I kissed her. She was still in pain, unsteady, but no longer a defeated, whimpering old woman.

"What happened?" I asked Miss Lind. "I thought it was an earthquake!"

"It was a bomb," said Elisabeth Lind in a low voice. "They very nearly got us that time."

"Yes, they did," I answered accusingly. "They know just where we are. Maybe they will stop if they think it was a direct hit."

She flushed and changed the subject. "Last time I was caught in an air raid I had my clothes on! This is most embarrassing." She snapped the top of her one stocking against her thigh.

"On the contrary," whispered Jane. "You always look lovely."

It was true, Miss Lind was *annoyingly* lovely, even wearing nothing but underthings and one darned stocking, her hair flying out of its plait like an untidy cloud of corn-colored candy floss. Her makeup never seemed to smear—I wondered if she slept in it. She didn't even look *cold*. She jumped up and began scavenging for something to wrap up Jane's fingers and wrist.

I kissed Jane's silver-white hair again. She was recovered enough to be herself—I could tell. Fighting. Thinking.

But my job had just become a hundred times more difficult.

Ellen:

I was downstairs in uniform and eating porridge when the bomb hit. The glasses rattled. My bowl slid and smashed on the flagstones. Nancy gave a wail and disappeared for a moment below the counter on the other side of the bar.

By the time the roaring stopped and I'd dived behind the bar to haul Nan to her feet and try to shut her skriking, Nobby Fergusson was pounding on the door—he'd seen the bomb fall and thought it hit the Limehouse. I left him with Nan and ran upstairs to Jane and Louisa.

There stood Sergeant Lind in her naughty French underthings and one stocking. I let out a howl of laughter and choked on it one second later when I spied Louisa on the floor with Jane.

"That was a Luftwaffe Junkers 88 with a fighter escort of Me-110s," I told them, passing on what Nobby told me. "They came straight here and scarpered off again, whilst our lot are stuck on the ground clearing snow, and *one* of our lads, not saying *who*, never made it out of bed yesterday. And Deeside is snowed in too. Not a single RAF plane in the sky to chase off the Jerries, and they *still missed the airfield!*"

"They might be aiming for something else," Louisa said quietly.

"Mrs. Warner needs a bandage," Sergeant Lind said. "She's twisted her wrist and dislocated her fingers."

"I'll fetch Nan's first-aid kit. Are you hurt, Louisa?"

Louisa shook her head.

"They got the hill above the limekilns," I went on. "If they'd waited a tenth of a second longer it would have hit this house."

Elisabeth Lind went to get dressed, but Louisa didn't want to leave Jane. We bound up the old woman's wrist and fingers, and pulled her off the floor and pushed her into the big stuffed armchair. But we couldn't put clothes on her and there was no way to get her downstairs unless someone carried her.

The bomb that missed the Limehouse did not fall harmlessly. You could tell that by leaning from Louisa's window. There were

sirens and shouts, and a scraping and pounding noise of men using spades and pickaxes against rock. The trees on the hill were aflame, and there came a delicious smell of burning pine, even through the window glass.

"Louisa, you *must* go find out what's happening!" Jane told her.

"But you can't get up! Supposing the house is on fire!"

Jane snapped at her, "Goodness, girl, you'd better find out if it is, hadn't you!"

Louisa and I both jumped. We'd neither one of us ever heard her speak so sharply.

"You can get about and I can't," Jane scolded. "Stop dithering and earn your keep."

Louisa looked as if she'd laugh and cry all at once.

"Bring me some coffee if the house isn't on fire," Jane added in a gentler voice. "I will hold the fort, as they say."

In the public bar, soldiers and firemen and the village Home Guard were running in and out and shouting to one another. The house did not look as if it were on the brink of falling down or burning up, but it was dark as a well because of the electricity being out. Nan rushed about boiling kettles and supplying folk with towels and blankets through the back door.

"What's happened?" I exclaimed.

"The limekilns have collapsed," Nan answered grimly. "Those Jerry prisoners are trapped. Maybe worse."

"Oh *no*!" Louisa cried.

Nan gave her a strange look.

"RAF Windyedge sent their fire crew across. They'll dig 'em out," Nan said. "The snow's melting fast, and if they clear the runway I think the lads will be flying tonight."

"I ken, I've got to hike back to the airfield in case they need me in the Tilly," I said. "Phyllis went before the bomb fell. Where's Sergeant Lind?"

Nan shrugged. "Wing Commander Cromwell popped in and nabbed her so she can translate when they dig out the Jerries. There's that much going on, I'm as glad not to have the house full of guests the day. Louisa, could you take this can of porridge out—"

"I'll do it, Mrs. Campbell," I interrupted. "Louisa has to stay with Mrs. Warner. She tumbled over when the bomb hit and she's hurt her arm. She can't use her sticks."

Nan pushed her wispy black hair away from her face and

rubbed her eyes.

“Whisht, I never believed I’d see this day,” she muttered, and slammed a full kettle on the hob. The blue flame of the gas burner gave a merry glow—God be thanked, the gas mains weren’t damaged. “Is she all right?” Nan asked. “Does she need the doctor?”

As a Traveller I don’t believe I ever wanted a doctor in all my years, but after I’d seen one or two airmen fly in with punctured lungs after an op, I respected medical folk more than I did as a wee lassie. Aye, Jane ought to see a doctor—but it could probably wait until the blaze in the nearby trees had been put out, and the trapped men rescued.

Louisa thought the same. “She’ll do for the moment,” she said. “I’ll look after her just now.”

Louisa:

Jane said she wanted coffee.

I tiptoed around the kitchen, trying not to get in Mrs. Campbell's way as I put together a tray. I couldn't bear to think of what was happening in the limekilns; it took every bit of sense I had in me not to pull on Mrs. Campbell's wellie boots again and rush outside. I carried Jane's tray upstairs. We couldn't listen to the radio, but we heard the men digging.

Early in the afternoon, the emergency workers uncovered Eberhard Moritz, and he was all right. They moved him to the aerodrome and kept digging. At the same time, men were also mending the underground electric cables that powered the Limehouse. I found this out from Morag Torrie, who brought us tea and sandwiches and some arnica tincture to rub on Jane's hurt hand.

"Mrs. Campbell's popped down to the village," Morag said. "There were so many folk in this morning, with the rescue, that she's out of milk and tea and cheese. I don't think she'll get any at the shop—she's not got the extra ration tickets and is cross about it. You've got the last of the bread. I'm off work now so I'll lock up, as the other girls are at the air base and you're alone here. Is Mrs. Warner warm enough? Oh, the fire's on and it's not three o'clock yet. Does Mrs. Campbell know?"

We both looked at the fire. I noticed that the meter had about an hour to go before it would need another shilling.

"She said to put it on for Mrs. Warner, as she's hurt and can't come downstairs," I said.

"Mrs. Campbell is a very generous woman underneath," said Morag stoutly. "She'll let herself in, but don't open up to that emergency crew, because there isn't anything else to feed them!"

"You can count on us to hold the fort," Jane repeated, as if it hadn't taken her twenty minutes to get to the toilet and back, hobbling with me for support and hanging on me with her bad arm over my shoulder while she wiped with her good one.

So Morag went and we held the fort.

Holding the fort meant trying to read aloud to Jane and stopping every ten minutes to stick my head out the window and try to work out if anything new had happened. We were both wildly restless. After an hour Jane exclaimed, "This will never do! Louisa, why don't you bring up the gramophone? We can have a concert."

So I went to get it.

Downstairs was dark. Even in daytime the unlit hall was gloomy, because it faced northwest and had only the one tall, narrow window letting in light opposite the landing at the top of the stairs. The public bar was gloomy too just now, without the fire burning or the lamp lit. I felt like an intruder. I hadn't ever been there during the day without people about.

I chose a stack of five record albums and laid them on an empty table to come back for. I took the gramophone up to Jane, set it on the floor between her and the bed where she could reach it, and came back down for the records.

As I returned to the shadowy front hall with my arms full, I heard footsteps above me shuffling along the passage from the back of the house.

My heart did its too-familiar somersault of guilt and fear. Had Jane managed to get to her feet and tried to reach the loo without my help? If she was using just one stick and fell again, wouldn't she likely try to catch herself with her empty hand—the hurt one?

I'd only been gone a *minute*!

I put down the records to free my arms so I could hold up Jane if she needed it.

Just as I started to climb the stairs, a young man in a flight suit crossed the landing above me and vanished down the dim passage.

I didn't see who it was, though I didn't think it was Jamie; it looked like a bigger man. But I wasn't afraid—there were airmen all over Windyedge. How had he got in, whoever he was? Morag had locked the door behind her. Had he been here *all afternoon*, since before Nan Campbell left the house?

I went up the stairs after him.

By the time I got to the landing, he'd reached Room Five. I'd left the door open, to make the return trip easier, expecting my arms to be full of records. I heard the airman gently close the door behind him.

I followed him down the passage and stood outside my own

shut door, listening.

Jane was speaking calm, matter-of-fact German.

She didn't sound frightened. She sounded perfectly at ease—interested. Pleasant. *Amused*.

The man answered her in German.

His voice was hoarse and ragged, a person at the end of his strength and patience. The polite way he spoke to Jane was familiar, and I remembered how the navigator Dietrich Althammer had bent toward her so she could hear him, as if she were his own granny.

Althammer was the one Felix Baer didn't trust, the one he'd tried to *kill*, just as they were coming in to land, when Althammer had least expected it.

I heard him say a word I understood, and Jane repeated it.

Enigma.

He was looking for the coding machine.

I didn't know what to do. If I went in, wouldn't Jane and I both be trapped? One smallish fifteen-year-old girl and one tottering eighty-two-year-old woman with a sprained wrist were not going to overpower a strong young airman, even if he had been locked up underground for a week.

His footsteps crossed the room as he made for the door.

I fled down the passage and through the first doorway I came to that was standing open—the loo.

I darted behind the open door. *Better not to try to close it....* Was I breathing too loudly, and why was he taking so long?

I *forced* myself to take slow, deep breaths. He might hear me if I panted, and I wouldn't be able to hear him. I listened, trying to think of a sensible thing to do—

And I heard one of Jane's sticks tapping.

The German airman was escorting her down the passage. She must have asked for help to reach the toilet. And, since she seemed to be a friendly, cooperative, ancient German native, he offered his strong arm for support. He coaxed her in German, and I heard her grateful response. She struggled through the doorway into the loo on her own.

Jane closed the door and saw me standing in the dim light cast through the arrow-slit window below the high-up water tank. She raised her bandaged hand to her lips to warn me to be quiet.

We heard the airman go downstairs. I slipped my arm around Jane's waist so she didn't have to put all her weight on one stick.

"How did he get in?" Jane whispered.

"It must have been the kitchen door!" Morag said she would lock up, but she might have only done the front. He could have come in any time that day. No one would have questioned anybody in a flight suit, even if they'd noticed him. "He must have used the service stairs at the back. Is it Althammer—the navigator? What does he want?"

"He's looking for the coding machine. I played dumb, but he'll try to find it now."

"Perhaps *that's* what Baer meant by a trap." I gasped. "A trap for the machine itself! If the Luftwaffe bombers can't destroy it from the air, perhaps they sent Althammer to try to destroy it on the ground!"

My voice had risen.

"Shhh," Jane hushed. "I thought of that."

"*What should I do?*"

"Wait," said Jane. "Just wait. Let him hunt. He might not find it. He's bound to start with our room when he returns upstairs, but he'll rush, because he knows I'm going back there." She paused, tilting her head to favor her left ear, listening. "I pushed the gramophone under the bed. He's likely to look there first, and as it's in its case, he might think it's the cipher machine and just grab it and run."

The house was silent around us. The only noise came from outside.

"Hush," Jane repeated. "All we need do is wait."

Once more, I had that false and foolish feeling that with her I was in the safest place in the house.

Suddenly, and irrelevantly, I remembered that the meter had run out and our gas fire must have cut off by now.

We heard the German airman come upstairs, and Jane was right—he went straight back to Room Number Five. We heard him close the door. But there was still so much muffled banging and shouting outside that we couldn't tell what he was doing.

Jane whispered urgently, "I must sit. I suppose there's only the throne. Help me—" It was easier lowering her than before, and we didn't have to fuss with her clothes. "Do you think you could open

the window, Louisa?"

The narrow glass in the arrow slit was solid—there wasn't any latch. "It doesn't open," I said.

"You'd better break it, then."

I stared at her.

"Why?"

"I think we should have some fresh air."

"But—!"

"Use my stick," she told me.

"Whatever will Mrs. Campbell say!"

"We need fresh air," Jane insisted, and then confessed softly, "I forgot to turn off the gas tap when the fire went out."

"The gas doesn't come back on until you put in another shilling," I told her.

"But I did," she admitted. "I put in a shilling just before I asked that young man to help me out here."

"Did you light the fire again?"

"No," she whispered. "I couldn't reach. I didn't want to ask him to do it..."

"But that means he's been in there with the gas leaking full on for half an hour!"

We stared at each other.

"Break the window," Jane told me.

And I did.

I took long breaths of fresh air before I set out to do the awful things that only I could do.

You have to breathe quite a bit of coal gas before it kills you. It makes you sleepy—people who die of it usually die in their sleep. I didn't *feel* like I was going to fall over in a dead faint, but I didn't know how much gas was in the passage, or how much I'd already breathed, or how much more I might have to breathe before I managed to open the window in our room, turn off the gas tap, and get out again. Or what I would do if Dietrich Althammer was perfectly all right and ready for a battle.

The only thing I was sure of was that I had to stop any more gas leaking into the Limehouse.

I crept to the closed door of Room Number Five and listened to the terrible stillness on the other side. I thought of my gas mask, chucked under the bed out of the way after the journey from

Liverpool. It couldn't help me now, and the German navigator would not have known it was there.

I went in.

He'd worked hard before the fumes overcame him. He tipped the mattress off the bed and up against the wall, and threw aside Jane's chair and the lamp and table to get to the gramophone in its shining wooden case.

He didn't even open it. He used my flute case to pound the gramophone into a mangled wreck of beaten metal and splintered wood. I couldn't tell if he'd done it out of fury, just because it wasn't what he was looking for, or if Dietrich Althammer really thought, at least before he started, that its polished lid hid the stolen Enigma machine.

Dietrich Althammer also lay in a crumpled heap next to the hearth, his mouth open and his eyelids half-shut. I didn't think he was breathing, but I didn't want to get close enough to make sure.

I had to step over his body to reach the gas tap.

Biting back sobs, I climbed over the fallen standing lamp to throw open a window. The radio sprang suddenly to life, right in the middle of a tune, as the electricity came back on.

It was "The Spitfire Song" again.

I wrenched open the wardrobe. The other glowing box sat there nestled safe and sound among the furs and tropical silks. I grabbed the rotors and snatched up the wooden case in both arms as if I were rescuing a baby from a burning building, and fled from the room.

Elisabeth Lind volunteered to move into a smaller room and give Mrs. Campbell's best double to me and Jane, so we didn't have to sleep in Room Five that night.

This makes no sense at all, but after I crawled into bed next to Jane as usual, I no longer felt safe.

She was an eighty-two-year-old woman with a sprained wrist and knees that did not bend, and she had, in cold blood and full awareness, killed a young man ten hours earlier.

I know she did it to protect me. I *think* she did it to protect me. I don't know if she could have done anything else. Dietrich Althammer was an enemy soldier. He was violent and frightening and dangerous—there wasn't any question about that now. But no matter how I danced around the facts and made excuses for her, a

man who was alive that morning was dead that night, and Jane had done it.

I wondered if she had done it before.

I lay awake beside this familiar stranger, wondering, and counted the Blenheim bombers as they roared out to sea under the waning moon, all six of B-Flight's aircraft, one after another.

It was just after midnight on Valentine's Day. *XIV II.*

I must have fallen asleep at last, because I didn't hear any of them come back.

Jamie:

The joke was, as the Valentine's Day moon came round, that of course we weren't sent to Utsira. No one was sent there—no one but me had seen that baited message about mythical U-boats.

"This'll remind you of last year's Norwegian Campaign, if any of you were around for that," Cromwell told us. All of us except Bill Yorke shook our heads; none of the rest of us had been operational a year ago. Ignacy and Derfel and Silver and I had fought in the Battle of Britain last summer, but we'd only been flying in combat for seven months. Wing Commander Cromwell sighed and cleared his throat.

"You're being sent on another retribution mission. You'll be targeting Stavanger, the Norwegian aerodrome they're using to get at Windyedge, and Coastal Command would like you to take flash bomb photographs of the new field at Lista while you're at it. A-Flight will attack Stavanger, and B-Flight will move on Lista again. We want to do damage on the ground—exactly what they're doing here. Get in and out quick as you can and keep away from the antiaircraft artillery."

It was a routine op. It wouldn't be safe. But it wasn't unreasonable.

Cromwell hadn't asked us to do anything unreasonable since—since mid-December? Since he confined me to barracks for getting the planes out of Windyedge when it first got bombed. And he'd complimented me at the same time for doing a good job. He sighed and barked and grumbled at me, and I argued with him. But now he *listened*.

For a few seconds I was lightheaded with relief that I wasn't leading anyone to Utsira—and a moment later my stomach was in knots with a new anxiety.

I couldn't let A-Flight take the op to Stavanger. That part of Norway is all peninsulas and islands and inlets, and Stavanger to Utsira is less than forty miles in a straight line, about ten minutes in a Blenheim flying at cruise speed.

“Permission to speak, sir?”

Cromwell sighed again.

“What is it this time, Beaufort-Stuart?”

“They’ll expect a raid, after so many attacks here, won’t they? Stavanger’s a huge operation,” I pointed out. “They’ll be ready. But Lista will be a piece of cake—it’s still under construction. And who has more combat experience, A-Flight or B-Flight?”

I knew that just by our U-boat score, B-Flight would win that contest hands down. For all our scrapping on the ground, we flew together confidently now.

“Let me guess what you’re trying to say, Beaufort-Stuart,” Cromwell rumbled. “You’re suggesting that B-Flight make the Stavanger run, while A-Flight takes on Lista?”

Then my lads astounded me.

They backed me up.

“I’m in,” said Adam Stedman. “Madeira Section is ready for a fight. Stavanger will be a tougher op than Lista, but Beaufort-Stuart’s always one step ahead of the Jerries.”

“Yes, he has a nose for them,” Derfel Cledwyn said.

“Scotty is careful, too,” put in Ignacy Mazur. “Though we do not always agree!”

“He’s usually right, though,” said Chip.

Bill Yorke snorted. But he said, “I’m in.”

“I didn’t think I’d last a week when I joined 648 Squadron,” said Harry Morrow. “At least now I know what we’re up against. Scotty’s a jolly good flight leader. I’m in.”

Up and down the operations room, Pimms and Madeira claimed the Stavanger assignment for B-Flight.

I was a bit stunned.

Silver nudged me in the ribs. “You’re a jolly good flight leader.”

“Stow it, mate,” I muttered. “Behind every good flight leader...”

He held up his hands: still in one piece.

We knew that every single op might end in nothing but death. But this time I felt sure no one was going into it blindly. We were doing it together.

“No heroics with Messerschmitts,” I reminded them.

“Keep us well south of Utsira,” I told Silver.

We flew north along the Scottish coast, past Aberdeen and RAF Deeside, on past Peterhead and Fraserburgh. Out to port, looking

over my gauntleted left hand on the control yoke, I could see moorland blanketed with snow, gleaming like icing sugar beneath the rising moon. Scotland lay quiet and still and dangerously cold. I wished Louisa could see it, and then I was glad she couldn't, was glad she wasn't there.

Off Fraserburgh we headed northeast out to sea. We flew at fifteen thousand feet to make the most of our speed, then came down to low level to avoid being tracked. Somewhere in the sky, A-Flight's leader, Rob Lucknow, called over the radio on his way to Lista. "Hullo, Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart!"

"It's a beautiful night for flying!" I told him, as if we were larking about.

"Enjoy it while you have the chance!"

We were over Norway in a little more than an hour.

Norway was as bright with snow and moonlight as Scotland, the rocky islets spread out in black and silver. It felt strangely still, nothing moving anywhere, no anti-aircraft guns firing. We passed low over the aerodrome at Stavanger and dumped our bombs on their runway and hangars. No one fired a single shot at us. There was nothing to hear but the hum of our own engines, and the explosions beneath us in the dark.

"Circle over the docks and dump whatever's left, and let's get out of here," I said.

"Too right," called Adam Stedman. "This place is giving me the heebie-jeebies."

We knew there was only one reason they weren't firing.

There must be Luftwaffe night fighters patrolling—probably not more than ten minutes away, waiting for us to turn up at Utsira hoping to bag another submarine. The gunners on the ground didn't want to hit their own planes, so they couldn't fire at us, either.

We detonated another load over the shipyard.

I climbed away, scanning the moonlit sky for dark wings, holding my breath. We were high now—we'd just about got away with it.

"Cup of tea, Jamie?" said Silver, handing me the steaming cup lid of the thermos flask. I took it and raised it to my mouth.

I'd been expecting an attack for the last half an hour; we all expected it, but none of us saw it coming. The first I knew there were Me-110s in the sky with us was when I saw one of Adam

Stedman's engines explode into flame beyond our starboard wingtip.

I banked automatically away and got a faceful of hot tea at the same time. Silver caught the cup as I dropped it, spluttering and cursing, and a bloody good thing he did, or it would have been rolling around jamming the rudder pedals. I saw Stedman's Blenheim screaming downhill as he dived in a desperate attempt to put the fire out, and I saw the black shape of the Messerschmitt 110 dive after him, then nothing but flames below.

The sky was suddenly full of the black wings of night fighters. Someone must have called them home. And of course they hadn't had far to go.

When you're there, fighting, it's hard to keep track of anyone but your own crew. People hare off out to sea to get away, or inland to make a crash landing, or down to treetop level to try to hide, or up to the heavens to get a better shot. And when a plane is in a spiral dive engulfed in flames, you often can't tell if it's one of your own or the enemy's. So a lot of my impression of that battle is based on what my crew was yelling into my earphones at the time. Silver had his head in the freezing gale out the open starboard window panel, barking instructions about which way I should turn; Chip gave us an irrepressible nonstop narrative from the gunner's turret like an auctioneer or a horse-race announcer.

"There goes another Messer, *hot damn!* Doesn't that make us official aces? I don't know who got that one—we're definitely down two Blenheims but I can't tell who's still flying. Pull her up five degrees, would you, cap'n, I don't want to shoot our tail off! Thank you—just a mo—" That was followed by the rattle of his gun. "Aw, missed. Turn right, *turn right—*"

"STARBOARD!" roared Silver, and I threw the Blenheim into such a steep turn that the whole machine shuddered, and I dived to avoid tumbling into a stall. Another plane screamed past my left ear and soared away before I'd straightened the wings.

"Gonna try again," Chip blethered on. "Here he comes, a little higher—" Another rattle of gunfire and a whoop of triumph. He yelled, "GOT YOU, TAKE THAT, YOU SON OF A—"

Something hit the turret so hard it knocked my head forward into the controls. I swam in sparkling blackness for a moment and when I came to, Silver was on his feet leaning over my shoulder,

desperately hanging on to the control yoke. An icy wind howled through the broken turret.

"I've got her," I gasped.

"You're getting bloody low," Silver gasped back. "Never thought I'd try to fly a plane again—"

"Nice work, mate," I croaked, leveling out.

"Cheers."

We didn't say anything about Chip. There wasn't anything to say.

Silver pointed ahead of us, northward.

A flotilla of German battleships were cruising full tilt along the craggy coast, black against the silver sea. They wouldn't reach us for another ten minutes, but they were trying their damndest not to miss out on the action.

That's what we would have found waiting for us if we'd gone to Utsira—a squadron of Messerschmitts above and a load of antiaircraft fire below.

In the end, it was swings and roundabouts, really.

Suddenly Ignacy's voice crackled into life through my headset.

"I'm on one engine and Taff is bleeding all over the cockpit. Cover me, Pimms Leader, I'm going to get those German bastards if it kills me. Keep the Messers off my tail. I'm going to sink a couple of those ships."

"There he is," Silver said, pointing. "Two o'clock, high. Get behind him so nobody can sneak up on him, and I'll climb back and see if the rear gun will still fire in case someone comes after us."

Everything else still worked. I had both my engines and all my control surfaces—only the rear turret dome had been shattered. I tore my mind away from Silver in the back, and what he'd have to deal with before he could climb into the rear gunner's seat. I focused on Ignacy and Derfel and Bill Yorke in the plane ahead of me.

We sped to meet the battleships. Silver and I had dropped our bombs over Stavanger a lifetime ago. I wondered, briefly and uneasily, why Ignacy hadn't already got rid of his. Or if he had, how he was planning to get through the flak and sink a battleship with the slow-firing guns in the nose of the Blenheim.

"Pimms and Madeira aircraft," I called. "Anyone about?"

Silence.

I hadn't even noticed the Australian schoolboys going down.

"Just us," Ignacy answered. "Thank you for the cover, Scotty, I am going in now—sorry, Yorkie, but I must take you with us."

Then he said something in Welsh to Derfel in a low voice.

That's when I realized what he meant to do.

"*We're aces now, Mazur,*" I yelled at him. "*Taff, Yorkie! We're all aces!*"

He chose the two ships that were closest together. He calculated the dive so he hit them both, the Blenheim cartwheeling across the deck of one and slamming into the other.

I climbed away through a trail of flame and shrapnel and a hailstorm of anti-aircraft fire. No one came after us.

Silver tossed the bundled-up dinghy over the back of his seat and climbed into the front cockpit after it. He sat down next to me again.

"Tex won't mind if we ditch him. Thought you and I might need this, though," he said.

"You are showing lack of moral fiber," I answered hollowly.

We limped a hundred miles back west across the open water, leaking fuel through the bullet holes, and when the fuel ran out I made a Mayday call over the radio, because that's what I'd been trained to do. If there was anyone out there to hear it, the chances of them being friendly were remote; we were still closer to Norway than to Scotland. Silver opened the hatch above us before I leveled the Blenheim to plow on its belly into the black-and-silver swell of the North Sea.

"My hands are both still in one piece," Silver said.

Then the Perspex in the nose gave way, letting in a waterfall of icy black salt water.

Silver grabbed the strap of the dinghy out of the deluge and shoved the whole bundle up through the hatch ahead of him. We were both in water to our waists in the dark and it was impossible to get a firm foothold. I managed to push Silver out after the dinghy, one of his feet in the palm of my hand and the other on my shoulder—I don't think he even realized he was standing on me. The Blenheim's wings kept her from going straight to the bottom of the sea, but they were full of holes like the rest of her and filling up fast.

Somehow I hauled myself through the hatch after Silver, and

we knelt clinging to each other on the starboard wing, slippery with seawater as the swell washed gently over it and back. Silver got the cover off the dinghy, but he couldn't get the inflating valve unscrewed, which we'd only ever seen demoed once, and the distance between pretending you're doing something in a drill and actually doing it in the dark in the middle of the North Sea is like the distance between yourself and the shores of Scotland while you're floating there on your sinking plane.

"Let me do it," I said, thinking of his chilblained fiddler's fingers. "Keep your gloves on."

I had to take off my gauntlets to release the valve. They were both instantly lost. Seconds before the Blenheim submerged beneath us, I finally got the dinghy to inflate. We didn't have time to climb into it. All we could do was hang on as the plane went down.

Our flight suits were full of icy water now, and it was like wearing armor made of lead. Neither one of us had the superhuman strength it would take to lift ourselves up over the side of the dinghy and into it. In five minutes I couldn't feel my hands at all.

So that was us, hanging on to a life raft we couldn't get into, up to our necks in water so cold it made every breath painful, under the most spectacular moon and starry sky I have ever seen.

"Sod this," said Silver through chattering teeth.

"Aye." It was too hard to breathe to try to talk.

"No, I mean sod this. Sod moral fiber. I can't do it. I'm d-d-d—I'm done. Thanks for b-being my pilot, Jamie. And my f-f-friend. If you make it b-b-back to Nancy's, take my tanner out of the ceiling and b-b-buy yourself a drink on me."

And then the bastard *just let go*.

Ellen:

When Louisa came down for Jane's breakfast tray on Friday morning, there was me standing at the bar picking at a bowl of porridge I would never eat if it were the last bowl of porridge on this earth. There was Nancy, banging cups about as usual, but not so usual was that she hadn't combed her hair—the hairgrips she fixed in it yesterday were sliding out and she'd not noticed. Elisabeth Lind sat at the table by the fire with her neb in a newspaper, studying the personal notices as if she were swotting for an examination. She turned the page and it covered her own untouched porridge, the paper making a wee camp tent over the spoon stuck out of the bowl. When Louisa came in, Sergeant Lind looked to see who it was and then looked straight back at her newspaper as if she were clockwork instead of flesh and blood.

I knew she must be dying inside. But we couldn't weep in each other's arms as we'd have done in peacetime. We had to play her stupid game of pretend.

"What's going on?" Louisa asked.

"Policemen, firemen, Germans, whatnot, I don't know," said Nan, sounding angrier than usual.

That was yesterday's news and we all knew it. Dietrich Althammer had been carried away last night, but the room he'd died in was still a dog's breakfast. They'd found how he escaped: when the rescue crew broke into his prison from the front, the old chimney was open to the sky above a heap of earth and broken stone and bricks and snow. The bomb debris had not hurt him, nor trapped him, and he'd scarpered up the chimney and lain hidden among the ruined pine trees on the ridge before creeping into the Limehouse.

Nancy didn't answer Louisa, and I couldn't speak, so that left Elisabeth Lind to tell her.

"The young men from 648 Squadron ran into trouble last night," Sergeant Lind said carefully, not looking up, turning another page. "Two planes confirmed down in B-Flight, and the rest are

missing. 'Failed to return' is how they report it."

Louisa met my eyes. I shook my head.

She put her face in her hands. I saw her swallow, but she couldn't speak. I knew what she wanted to ask.

"Jamie made a radio call to Rob Lucknow in A-Flight while the party was going on," I told her, though I felt like my own voice would choke me. "He told Rob that Madeira was two down and that A-Flight should clear off before the Messers got wind there were more Blenheims about. A-Flight got back all right, but that was the last we heard from any of the others."

"What do you mean, 'any of the others'?" Louisa croaked. "Pimms and Madeira *both*? But it's broad daylight!"

Nan turned her back, not even able to take a keek at us while we talked.

"Phyllis said she'd ring if she gets news," I said. "They might have landed away like they did the first time Windyedge got bombed. Sometimes if they're shot up they'll land at the nearest base, any old base, instead of coming home."

"Oh."

Poor disguised Elisabeth Lind stared at her newspaper. Anybody could tell she wasn't reading it.

One of the firemen came in through the front door. We spun around.

"We've just got the last Jerry out," he said. "Do you mind if we bring him in to warm him up? Not sure where Old Cromwell wants him, but he's had a pretty rough time and he's not in any shape to march to the aerodrome—he's been fair buried alive for a solid day."

Nancy faced the fireman with empty eyes and shrugged. "Do what you like," she said.

And they brought in our old friend, that Jerry pilot Felix Baer.

He was all over dust. His hair and face were all one color, gray as gray. His eyes were black pools in the gray dust.

Elisabeth Lind jumped to her feet, but Louisa was there first. She leaped forward and snatched at his hand.

The gray dust cracked around his lips as he smiled at her faintly.

Louisa:

He took my other hand too. I thought of piano keys beneath those bony, nimble fingers; I could feel his ring with the engraved bear cool against my palm. They were things that made him whole before the war and were still part of him.

He leaned down quickly and I stood on my toes and we kissed each other's faces.

I felt the gray dust come off on my cheek. He let go of one hand to brush it off me; he didn't let go of the other.

I pointed to Elisabeth Lind. "That is Calypso. *Not me.*"

She nodded in agreement, looking as if she were about to cry. "It's true," she said. "I *am* Calypso."

I didn't dare say anything else; the room was full of guards and firemen.

Miss Lind pulled Jane's comfortable chair close to the fire. The men from the aerodrome covered it with a blanket to protect it, and they let Felix Baer sit and lean forward with his hands close to the flames.

He spoke haltingly, trying to explain himself.

"He wishes he had stayed here in November," Miss Lind translated softly. "But he didn't want to break the link in his resistance network. After his first trip they began to watch him. They must have known what he'd done—what he left here. They sent him to bomb Windyedge himself—on Christmas Day, can you believe? But he didn't. Althammer was his navigator on that flight, and when Althammer didn't report his failure, Baer and Moritz disagreed about *why*. Moritz thought it was because he was sympathetic. But Baer suspected it was because he wanted to string them along and trap them both later."

Miss Lind continued, listening to what Baer said and then going on again. "Baer turned out to be right, but Moritz was in charge, so when they were forced into a corner and cooked up the idea of defecting, Moritz brought Althammer along. And that's exactly what Althammer wanted: a chance to destroy their secret on the

ground.”

She and Felix Baer spoke together in quick, fluent German, nodding in agreement, comparing notes. She reached into her uniform pocket, fished out a handkerchief, and gave it to him so he could wipe his face.

I didn't know what the German meant, but I knew what she was telling him.

Althammer failed. He's dead. Your boss, Eberhard Moritz, isn't hurt. My commanding officer is on his way back from Africa. Felix Baer straightened up a little. *I have the Enigma machine and copies of the documents you brought, and they are safe.* Beneath the bruising and the grime, his face was alight with hope. He glanced at me.

“I'm sorry it took me so long to understand,” I said. I meant it for both of them.

He said something else. Elisabeth Lind's mouth twisted into a crooked little smile as she translated. “He asks if you would play some music.”

The gramophone was gone. If I started at the piano—Jane was upstairs waiting for breakfast, and she wouldn't stay put if she caught wind of music down here without her. To be honest, why should she? I knew how she hated to miss anything. But she couldn't come down the stairs.

“I want Jane to be able to hear,” I said. “I'll get my flute and play it in the hall.”

The tea on Jane's breakfast tray had cooled. I knew she wouldn't care, and took it up with me.

She sat gazing out the big bay window in Room Number Four, staring far away over the rooftops of the village and the wide sea beyond.

But she turned her head as I came in and gave me a small half smile.

“I was wondering where you'd got to!” she said.

“Felix Baer is here,” I told her. “He asked for music.” I screwed the pieces of the flute together. The case was cracked and battered, but my flute was all right. Like me: jarred but undamaged. I stood up, took a deep breath, and played an F scale. Still warming up, I started “Jane and Louisa.”

Jane hadn't forgotten the words. She sang in harmony with the flute, a third below the melody. *“Jane and Louisa will soon come home....”*

She broke off.

“Are they going to arrest me again?” she asked.

A chatty police inspector had come round in the afternoon yesterday, and he hadn’t said anything about arresting her. But he hadn’t let her off, either. *Sorry about your fall, I expect you are quite dazed—you must have a doctor in to look at your arm! Don’t be careless with the gas fire.*

I wondered if she was hoping that they *would* arrest her.

“I don’t know,” I admitted.

I stood halfway down the stairs, exactly between Felix Baer in the public bar and Jane Warner in the best double room. *What can I play for them both?* I wondered, feeling self-conscious and awkward.

Put your shoulders back, Lula, I imagined Mummy saying. *Make your daddy proud.*

Mendelssohn.

But I couldn’t remember the intricacies of the middle part of the *Hebrides Overture*. “Rhapsody in Blue”? I wouldn’t make it the whole way through that, either; not without reading music.

And then I remembered the Bach “Ave Maria,” whose glorious long slow tones were easier to pick out and linger over: Johanna von Arnim’s first record.

And as I played, I wondered if there had been music on Daddy’s sinking ship, a bugle playing “Reveille” or “The Last Post.” Or had he sung hymns in his deep, rolling voice, the way we’d sung in the storm-tossed rowboat at Lime Cay? I wondered if Mummy had been humming to herself when the bomb fell, one of her students’ exam pieces, or a hymn for someone’s wedding. *Music*, right till the end.

I’d never know. I hadn’t been with them.

I thought of Jamie in the moonlight over the North Sea last night, with Silver next to him and Chip Wingate alone in the back.

I didn’t finish the Bach. In the hall below me, the telephone rang, and Ellen ran to answer it.

Ellen:

"The Limehouse, Volunteer McEwen speaking," I croaked into the receiver.

"Hello, Ellen, pet, it's Phyllis." She was hoarse too. "I thought Mrs. C. should know the latest."

Dread clung like a strangling rope around my throat and I didn't ask her to go on. But she did anyway.

"Harry Morrow landed at Deeside five hours ago. Textbook landing. He didn't taxi, though, just shut down the engines on the runway, so the ground crew ran out to see what was going on. And when they opened up the hatch they found all three of those Australian boys were already dead."

"All three of them!" I gasped.

She'd told it without a sob, but now she began to weep.

"However did they get home if they were *already dead*?" I cried.

"Dougie and Gavin had been dead for hours. But Harry, that lovely boy, I was dancing with him only *last week*—" She sobbed. "He hung on and hung on until he made it home. One lung and his stomach *full* of holes and somehow he just kept flying until he was home, and he even managed to land safely, and—what was he thinking all that time that he managed to hang on so long? How he tried to kiss me in the porch of the Limehouse that warm night last December? Or just staring desperately at that stupid picture of his dogs taped to his instrument panel and longing to see them again? And then—"

I sat bent over myself on the stool in the telephone cupboard under the stairs, listening to her keening, and I felt as if those bullets were in my own lungs and stomach.

"The rest of Pimms?" I choked.

"Failed to return." Phyllis took a breath. "They might have got away, though. You know what Scotty and Ignacy are like, flying foxes. They'll hide in cloud, hedgehop at sea level, whatever it takes. If they had to ditch in the water or make a crash landing in the middle of the Highlands, it might be days before we hear from

them....”

Phyllis’s blethering trailed off. If they ditched in the North Sea or crashed on some mountaintop they’d likely just drown or freeze to death.

“I’m glad Rob’s lads in A-Flight made it,” I breathed. “Give him our best.”

“I will,” said Phyllis.

“And ring us again when you hear anything else.”

My throat closed up, thinking about those three young lads bringing themselves home on luck and hope, dead men even before they landed.

“I will,” Phyllis repeated. “Tell Mrs. Campbell.”

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Louisa:

I couldn't believe they were all gone.

I just *couldn't believe it*.

But the day crawled by, and Phyllis didn't ring back. Next morning Elisabeth Lind went with Felix Baer and Eberhard Moritz in a transport plane to deliver the Enigma machine to Intelligence. She caught hold of me before she left, smart and official in her uniform with her peaked cap fixed neatly over her braided hair. But she was pale and pink-eyed beneath the perfect makeup, as if she'd spent the night crying.

"Louisa, can I borrow you downstairs?" she said. "I've only ever flown once before, so—"

She held up a sixpence.

"I wish you'd tell me which wishing coins are Pimms's ones. I want to put mine with them."

"They don't do a thing," I said hollowly. "They're superstitious nonsense. *They—*"

My voice rose to a sob. Couldn't I have done anything else—convinced Jamie not to fly that way, that night? What if I'd got Felix Baer and Elisabeth Lind together earlier? What if I'd gone straight to Wing Commander Cromwell?

None of it seemed possible, but the what-ifs kept spinning in my head like a gramophone turntable that wouldn't stop.

Miss Lind reached up and caressed my cheek with soft fingertips.

"I know," she said quietly. "*I know.*"

I couldn't imagine what it was like having to pretend your brother hadn't just been lost at sea. Or wherever he was lost.

"I want my sixpence to be there too," she said. "And I'm never coming back for it. I want it to be up there forever with the rest of them."

I swallowed and nodded. "I'll show you which is Jamie's," I told her softly.

The moon was waning and the freezing fog returned and Windyedge was quiet.

Phyllis wrote her horrid reports by the fire in the Limehouse. The ground crew helped with the heavy work as we tidied up Room Five. I did not believe anyone could ever sleep in it again, but we put it back to being Mrs. Campbell's second-best double room. Everything in it still worked.

The policemen didn't come back straightaway, but a doctor looked at Jane's wrist, and said it would be fine and gave her strengthening exercises. After a few days, Ellen helped me bring her downstairs. Nobody fooled about on the piano. We couldn't play records, though we read some of the album notes out loud. We swapped newspapers, doing the crosswords and fine-combing the casualty lists. The telephone never rang, and there were no planes to count in.

Exactly one week after the limekilns were bombed, as permitted hours began at half past five, I unlocked the front door for Mrs. Campbell. Standing in the vestibule, I heard tire chains and an unfamiliar engine laboring up the lane. I opened the door to look, just as a low-slung red motorcar coughed to a stalled halt in front of the Limehouse.

Flight Lieutenant James Gordon Erskine Murray Beaufort-Stuart climbed out.

He didn't bother to open the car door. He crouched on the seat and swung his legs over the edge of the open top as if it were a hatch on a Blenheim bomber.

For a moment I thought he was a ghost.

Never mind all my modern education and not being a fool-fool country gal. I actually thought he must be a dead man walking. I thought it must be a ghost-car driven by a ghost.

He was wearing the same flight suit and sheepskin-lined leather jacket he'd taken off in a week ago. They were stiff with water damage and crusted with salt. The thin, fair beginnings of a beard stubbled his filthy face. His eyes were unchanged, clear, bright hazel with a touch of madness in them.

"Hello, Louisa," he rasped, and I held the front door open for him.

I was too shocked to touch him. I didn't dare. I didn't—he'd suffered something I didn't understand, and it scared me like nothing had ever scared me before. *What if it was my fault?* Had I

helped send him into that hell?

I couldn't do anything but follow him into the house.

He limped to the bar.

Nancy Campbell looked up and dropped a glass. It smashed into a thousand pieces on the cold stone floor.

"Oh, sweet Jesus," she sobbed.

"Jamie Stuart," Ellen whispered. "God be thanked."

He didn't look at any of us. He raised his head and scanned the oak beam above the bar, all shiny with shillings and sixpences and threepenny bits. He reached up and twitched out one coin.

"Silver promised to buy me a pint," he said hoarsely. His voice grated as if he hadn't used it since the last time we saw him.

The thin sixpence clinked on the brass top of the bar as Jamie slapped it down. For a few seconds he held his hand spread out there over the coin, staring at his fingers in fascination and disgust. Ellen and Phyllis and Jane were all sitting and couldn't see his hand. But Mrs. Campbell could see it from where she faced him over the bar, and I was standing just one step behind him and I saw it too.

His little finger and ring finger were black as tar, black as bitumen, as if he had dipped them in ink to the second knuckles. The skin faded through gray and blue and green and purple back to where his fingers joined his hand. The rest of the hand was pale and filthy and covered with angry red blisters. But it was alive. The black fingers were dead.

Mrs. Campbell let out another sob. *"What—?"*

Jamie shook his head. "The others are the same," he said. He laid his left hand on the bar lined up with his right hand, all ten fingers spread flat. The last two fingers of his left hand were mostly as blackened and dead as the ones on the right.

"Frostbite," he said. "It happened on the boat that picked me up. I was all right in the water—it was warmer than the air." He rubbed his knuckles into his eyes. "I got lucky. It was a fishing boat working with the Norwegian resistance—they had machine guns hidden in oil barrels. They heard my Mayday on their radio and came looking for us. But it took two more days to make landfall in Shetland, and it was bloody cold sitting on the deck."

"Us?" whispered Mrs. Campbell.

"Give us a drink and I'll tell you what happened," Jamie said, rapping the sixpence on the countertop. "I'm parched."

Ellen:

He told his dreadful tale in a dull voice. We listened without daring to speak, though Nancy sobbed quietly all through the last bit. When he'd finished he wrapped both hands around his heavy ale as if it could warm them, and raised his glass.

"Flying Officer David Silvermont," he said hoarsely. "Absent friends. Madeira and Pimms. Now we're official aces."

He drank slowly, and that's when I saw his blackened fingers.

"Och, Jamie-lad!" I exclaimed in alarm. "Why aren't you *in hospital*?"

"I had to come here. Silver told me to buy myself a drink with his tanner at Nancy's, and I'm doing it."

I wanted to shake him. Here he was alive, his two hands ripe with gangrene, and he'd nothing better to do than toss back a pint in the pub?

"You know my own twin brother nearly lost a leg with blood poisoning after Dunkirk last spring!" I said furiously. "If you don't get those fingers off they will *kill you*."

He shrugged. "Can't feel 'em. Stopped worrying about 'em when they stopped hurting. Can't feel my toes, either, but I haven't looked. I can drive. I bet I can fly, too."

He sighed, and put his head down on his arms on the bar.

"I went home first," Jamie mumbled, his head sticking out of the wool collar of his leather jacket like a tortoise. "One boat to Orkney and another to the mainland, and then I got a ride with a forestry crew. But I should have come straight here. The moment I got down from the lorry I wanted to be here. So I took the car and drove myself. It's not far."

"Did you come in your mother's car? Does she know you took it? Where did you get the petrol? Is there enough left to get to Aberdeen?"

"Yes, no, don't know," he answered wearily. "Probably."

"*Hospital*," I ordered. "*Now*. I'll drive."

Louisa:

We heard the car motor start, stop, start again. Then it roared away down the hill with its tire chains clattering.

Jane bent at the waist, leaned over, and toppled a stack of peat bricks with one hand. She shoved them into the fire with her foot.

“Louisa is shivering,” she said. “Louisa is always cold.”

“Well, goodness, let’s build the fire up at once,” Phyllis exclaimed. “This place is never properly warm. What did Sergeant Lind say—the ghosts will leave if they get warm enough!”

Practical, well-behaved Phyllis suddenly leaped to her feet and slammed peat bricks into the fire. She grabbed the bellows and fanned the flames. Jane tried to reach around her with the poker and banged it on the hearth, not doing much but making a great noise. Phyllis shoved more peats on. Flames licked around the corners of the blocks and grew taller.

It was *wonderful*.

In a minute it became the biggest, brightest blaze we ever had in that house. It filled the room with rosy light and threw streamers of gold up the chimney. As it burned higher, light caught on the rows of copper and silver pressed into the wood, dull and burnished and shining.

“Build it up—”

I couldn’t in a million years work out who to blame for what happened next.

It was Jane urging us on. She was the one who kept saying, “More fuel! Another log!” But it was me who took the poker from Jane’s frail grasp and stirred up the embers and turned over the flaming blocks of peat. Phyllis was the one who kept putting more of them in the fire. And Nan Campbell didn’t ever tell us to stop.

In the blazing heat, something fell gleaming like a raindrop full of sunlight and hit the stone hearth with a *clink*.

Then there was another. *Clink. Clink*—another. Then half a dozen all at once, *clinkclinkclinketyclinketyclink*—as if someone had thrown a handful of coins into the fireplace.

We all fell still, listening and staring.

The heat of our inferno was sucking moisture out of the mantel, shrinking it as it dried, and the old wood was letting go of its wishing coins.

One by one they popped out of the black oak beam and plinked on the hearth, pennies and tuppences and silver threepenny bits put there by generations of fishermen and crofters, and by the young men who died in the first Great War.

Alan Anderson. Ben Knox. Cammy McBride.

The fire was warming them up, and the coins and the ghosts were leaping from the thick walls.

Duncan Campbell.

With a great sob, Mrs. Campbell grabbed her heather broom and tried to sweep the coins from the hearth into the fire. But they fell out of the mantel faster than she could sweep.

Clinkclinkclinkety clink-clink-clink.

It was like Morse code spelling the names of dead men.

In a frenzy, Nan accidentally swept the bundle of dried heather into the fire too. The broom flared up in her hands like an incendiary bomb.

She yelped and dropped it. Her apron was on fire as well. She ripped it off, threw it into the blaze, and leaped away from the hearth.

Then the mantel caught fire.

It went up all at once—the old wood just reached its flash point, and a curtain of flame stretched across the whole length of the hearth and up to the ceiling. For a few seconds, every one of us was too stunned to do anything—we just stared.

Then Mrs. Campbell screamed, “*The ceiling!* Phyllis! There’s a bucket behind the bar—fill it and help me!”

She became suddenly modern and efficient, wielding a proper soda-acid fire extinguisher in both hands, fearlessly aiming it overhead and sending a jet into the flames licking at the oak beam over the bar. “Louisa, get Aunt Jane outside! Then come back and try to ring for the firemen at Windyedge! Get Jane a chair if you can—”

Phyllis ran to fill the bucket. I hauled Jane over my shoulder by her good arm.

I left her shivering against the stone wall out front, between the scorched pines on the ridge and the dancing orange light behind the

deep windows of the Limehouse. I had time to dash in to make the Mayday call. But I didn't have time to get a chair. Nan and Phyllis turned me out as I tried to step into the bar.

Jane wasn't where I'd left her.

She lay on the gravel in front of the Limehouse. She'd tried to come back in by herself. What for—the records, her wonderful jazz collection and the Johanna von Arnim recordings—her faked British passport?

I think she came back for me.

It was much worse than her first fall. It was hard to tell what was wrong.

"Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh," she moaned quietly, over and over.

"Louisa, run down to the Torries' and get a blanket and some brandy," said Mrs. Campbell. "We can't move her without help."

"Oh no!" I cried. "I left her alone a minute ago and *look!* I'm not going *now*—"

"I'll go," said Phyllis.

I knelt beside that wonderful old woman on the icy gravel with my arms around her, trying to keep her warm with my own warmth. The stones drove through my stockings into my knees like shards of frozen glass.

Couldn't I have stopped *this*, this one thing?

But I'd *had* to ring for the firemen!

"They won't arrest me now," Jane whispered.

"Nobody's going to arrest you! Ever!"

She clutched my sweater. "Louisa? Don't go, my lovely Louisa."

"I'm not going anywhere," I said.

Oh no, sang a panicked fugue in the back of my head, *don't do this to me, Jane Warner! Don't leave me alone again, I like it here, I like it with you, this hasn't been long enough, who will play duets with me? We haven't finished the last lot of library books, we need to buy you a new gramophone, there's no one else! Oh God, did Jamie feel like this, like this, when his best friend let go and sank in the icy black water? How did he bear it, how did he not let go himself?*

But he was there. *He was there* for Silver. And I was here for Jane.

I didn't let her know how I was panicking.

"I'm not going anywhere," I repeated. "You're not alone."

I held her, while we waited for what would happen next, and I

sang softly.

*“Jane and Louisa will soon come home,
They will soon come home,
They will soon come home;
Jane and Louisa will soon come home,
Into this beautiful garden.”*

Music. Right till the end.

So proud of my girl, said my daddy’s voice in my head. *A real voyager.*

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Ellen:

“Are you all right, Louisa?” I whispered.

We lay together one night later inside the dark-as-dark of an old-fashioned box bed, a thing like a huge cupboard in the big room of Morag Torrie’s cottage. It had a heather mattress such as I slept on all my life until I joined up, piled with quilts and blankets. Another box bed beside ours held Morag and her parents—Phyllis and Nan were in a different cottage.

“I think I’m all right,” she whispered back. “What about you?”

“Och, no bother.”

We lay among the lumps of dry heather staring into blackness.

“You always say that. Really, ‘no bother’?” Louisa asked.

“Well, a mite done in.”

I came back to Windyedge the day after the fire. I sat in the hospital in Aberdeen all night while Jamie had his fingers and toes chopped off, and then I stayed to comfort his mam the next morning while he slept off the sedatives and the morphine before the doctors let anybody see him.

“I’m awfully glad you’re here,” Louisa said. “I was by myself last night, and it was dreadful. Nan didn’t want to share with me and I was so worn out and miserable after the firemen left, I just gave in for once and let Phyllis sort things. But I *hated* being alone.”

Morag’s parents hadn’t wanted me under their roof, either, after she told them I was a Traveller. But Phyllis sorted that, too. *Of course you must put Ellen up, she is a servicewoman! Louisa won’t mind sharing.* Aye, throw the two outcasts together.

Neither of us minded sharing, but it is not nice to feel unwelcome.

“Morag said you walked the last ten miles to Windyedge from the rail station!” Louisa said.

“I like walking.” It seemed a long time since I’d walked anywhere, really *walked*. “I like walking more than driving. It gives you time to think. My family walked all over Scotland when I was wee, following the work. It’s hard with the war on. The young

people have all gone for soldiers or are in factories, and most of us hate it—so many flipping rules and regulations, and the same routines day after day, and having to kill. My brother hates it. I'm lucky at Windyedge... except when the planes go down. It's like raising pet lambs, you give them daft names and watch them grow, and then when you send them to the butcher, you wish you hadn't bothered."

Louisa sighed. "Yes, it's *awful*. It's awful."

"At the Limehouse I've been under one roof, the same roof, for longer than I've ever stayed in one place ever," I confessed. "Ten times as long. Fifty. I don't know."

Louisa was quiet for a moment, and then launched one of her familiar well-aimed torpedoes at me. "That old man was quite rude to you when you were having your sandwich in the pub the other day, I thought."

"They're always like that to Traveller folk, unless we're digging their garden or mending their pots," I told her. "And of course Morag blethered about me to the whole village, so now everybody knows."

"But her parents weren't so rude," Louisa said. "They were just... a bit like Nancy. They expected one thing, but they also knew you were the driver for RAF Windyedge and Phyllis's friend, and they had to—open up their heads a bit to take it in. I suppose I do, too."

I was surprised to realize I knew just what she meant.

"That is how I feel thinking about Jamaica!" I exclaimed. "It seems a fairy tale, not a place where ordinary people live and buy stamps and make whooping-cough mixture and burn the cooking when they're weary. I wish I could see it."

"Well, you say you are a Traveller—it's a good long journey!"

She made me laugh.

"You are so brave to have told everyone about yourself," Louisa murmured. "You *knew* the trouble it would make you."

"I couldn't hide forever," I said. "But you can't *ever* hide."

"No, but in Scotland I'm just *one*. People are often more curious than horrid if there's just one of you. The villagers stare at me, but they're not nasty."

I laughed again, more bitterly. "Would you listen to the pair of us—as if it's easier or harder for one or the other! It's *different*, but mostly it's just *hard*."

"Jane said I had to fight," Louisa said. "She said the world was poisoning itself, and I was young, so it was up to me to make it better."

I heard her sniff. She loved that old woman.

After a bit I asked her quietly, "What will you do now?"

She sighed. "Mrs. Campbell asked me to stay and help her put the Limehouse right, and work for her when the damage is mended, at the same wages I had for looking after Jane. So I will be all right for a bit."

"Can the Limehouse be mended?"

It looked like a great old smoking ruin when I saw it earlier the day.

"There was a fire inspector round this morning. He says the building's sound. The damage was mostly to the bar, and only Room One had smoke in it. They let us in to collect clothes and things! My flute and my passport and wages, and Mummy's album of Jamaica photographs—all fine. Mrs. Campbell is Jane's next of kin, so she'll have a little extra to pay for the repairs."

"I wish I'd seen the blaze," I said. "Poor old Nan. Poor old Jane."

"It wasn't sad," Louisa said. "Or—I was sad, but Jane—she seemed *ready*. She *was* ready. And I was—I was so lucky to be there. I wasn't there for either of my parents. I was—" She grasped for the right word. "It was a blessing to be there with her. I was *blessed*."

"I'm glad," I said, and twined my fingers through hers to squeeze them tight.

"How is Jamie?" Louisa whispered.

My turn to grasp at words, though I'd known she'd get round to asking when she was good and ready.

Truthfully, I didn't know how he was. I'd seen him for five minutes when his mam went in, and he was barely awake, dazed and mazy. I'd felt like an intruder on his mammy's grief, so I'd left them to it.

"Not very well," I said at last. "In pain. Missing half his fingers and all his toes. Out of work. And blaming himself for seventeen young men dead. Which isn't his fault at all, at all."

In the black quiet of the box bed, Louisa cried so silently I didn't hear until she gasped for air.

"Oh God," she said. "Oh God, I think it's my fault."

"*Your fault?*" The words burst out of me as a sob. "It's not *your*

flipping fault, Louisa! What about those Messerschmitt 110 night fighters?”

“I translated all that code.”

“He *gave* you all that code to translate! Nor did I have to pass it on, which I did willingly! We did it *together*.”

“But if he hadn’t flown to Norway—”

“Och, you’re just as bad as he is!” I exclaimed. “He *had* to fly to Norway. That’s what they *do*. It’s their war work. Sometimes they don’t make it back.”

I tossed off the covers and scrambled to my knees in the inky black. “*All right*, I can prove to both you gumpuses it was an op just like any other.”

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Louisa:

Ellen threw open the door at the end of the bed. The room beyond held a faint memory of light, red in the hearth, paler black around the curtained windows. Ellen climbed out of the box bed, felt her way to the door where her satchel hung on a peg, and brought the bag back.

Back inside the closed box bed, she lit an electric torch. She gave me a square blue notebook, like a clothbound exercise jotter. She held her torch so I could look at the cover.

Printed on the blue cloth in black ink it said *Royal Air Force: Pilot's Flying Log Book*.

Beneath that was a space for the owner's name. In looping script like a schoolboy's was written *James G. Beaufort-Stuart*.

"He asked me to fetch it," Ellen said.

I let the notebook fall open. It was a list of all the flights Jamie ever made with the Royal Air Force, right back to his first training flight, not much more than a year ago. I turned pages carefully. His early operational entries, last summer as the Battle of Britain began, were like the casualty lists. He was supposed to log how long each flight took and where he'd gone, but he also noted every time anyone in 648 Squadron was shot down. Then there wasn't room for that. So sometime in September he limited it to just his mates in Pimms Section.

Then there was the entry for 7 November 1940.

That night, men had died in A-Flight as well as B-Flight. Jamie had listed the names of six men in Pimms and added a note that said, *Also five lost in Madeira and thirteen in A-Flight*. His pen nib had torn the page where he'd drawn a line under *also* for emphasis.

Twenty-four men died that night—two-thirds of 648 Squadron, more even than last week.

They'd died on a routine mission.

And I knew then that Ellen was right. The Valentine's mission had also been routine. The deaths that night didn't have anything to do with me.

But I also knew that I'd feel like they were my responsibility forever, all of us would feel responsible forever, even if there wasn't anything Jamie or I or Ellen or Felix Baer or anyone could have ever done to prevent those deaths.

I closed the book with a sob.

Ellen dropped the torch. She rocked me like a baby, dropping little kisses on my head and crooning in a language I didn't understand. She was crying too.

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Jamie:

I fought my way up from the bottom of an endless cold black sea where the whole of me was frozen except my hands and feet, and they were on fire.

After a bit I remembered where I was, and how I'd got here, and I opened my eyes.

I didn't recognize the room. I remembered vaguely that Mother had been there, though, and it was pretty obvious she had, because I was surrounded by snowdrops and daffodils. There was a colony of jam jars full of dainty white drooping blossoms on the stand beside my bed, and a forest of white and yellow flowers in jugs and medical beakers on a wheeled steel trolley at my feet, and tall spears of unopened green buds were stood in buckets on the floor all around the walls. There must have been a thousand of them.

And my wee German-speaking sister was there, at work filling the windowsill with more daffodil-stuffed jam jars, wearing her blue WAAF uniform and looking like herself again. She'd got rid of the operatic plaited crown of hair and the ridiculous fake eyelashes. Bit of lipstick, hair done up in that French-style twist our grandmother liked, still elegant. But more ordinary. Without the mask.

"Oi, Sergeant *Lind*," I croaked. "People will recognize you."

She let go a handful of two dozen half-opened daffs, scattering bright yellow flowers all over the floor around her feet, and raised her head. She looked as if she'd been awake all night crying.

"Jamie-lad," she breathed. "How are you?"

"Och, no bother."

"*Liar.*"

She dragged the one chair over by me and rested her chin on her folded hands on the bed next to my head. My own hands lay swaddled in bandages so that nobody including me could see what had happened to them, and my feet were under a little tent to keep the bedclothes off them. She was careful not to touch me.

"Who's the bloody liar?" I accused. "*Sergeant Elisabeth Lind!*"

“Lind is part of my name. And I borrowed Elisabeth from the Queen. Lots of people call me Queenie.”

“Only Ellen does that,” I disagreed hoarsely. “Why did you have to get assigned to Windyedge, of all places?”

“I was supposed to collect a German coding machine for Intelligence,” she hissed in my ear, “only some bugger from the RAF had stolen it and set up his own private special operations ring so he could go on submarine hunts.”

God, my hands and feet hurt—that wasn’t a dream. I didn’t dare to move, and I didn’t want to think back to that last flight.

“I thought you’d *help* me,” she added petulantly.

“We damn well did help you. It wasn’t easy, though, with you being in disguise as a Swiss milkmaid. Ellen and I had a job not to fall about laughing and blow your cover.”

“I *had* to. I was *told*. That was for the Germans. So they’d take me seriously.”

“They took Louisa jolly seriously, and she just goes about as her proud wee self.”

“They’re coming to see you,” said my sister. “Louisa and Ellen, I mean, not the Germans. They said they’d wait until you were more likely to be awake.” She raised her head to plant a quick kiss on my cheek. “I couldn’t wait, though.”

It was nice to be able to talk to her properly, like coming up for air after thinking you were going to drown. A better painkiller than the morphine.

“I’m glad you didn’t,” I said.

Louisa:

Jamie was sitting up when Ellen and I got there in the afternoon. His pale skin was covered with scabs beneath the scraggly week-old beard, and his bandaged hands lay in his lap. The clear hazel eyes, unfocused in his narrow fox's face, went bright and excited when he saw us.

His sister was perched on the edge of his bed, and she also looked up as we came in. Now that she was without her painted face and plaited crown of hair, sitting next to Jamie and wearing the same expression of welcome and relief, I couldn't believe I hadn't seen right away how alike they were.

I had to admire her for pulling it off.

Ellen strode across the hospital room full of spring flowers, leaned down, and kissed Jamie on the mouth.

"There you are, Jamie Stuart. You owe me that one from before."

Then she turned to the girl who wasn't Miss Lind and they held each other so close and tight that the copper and gold hair tangled together at the sides of their heads.

At last they all stopped cuddling. I felt like a bit of a gooseberry. I wouldn't have dared to kiss Jamie, even on the cheek; I was still a bit in awe of him.

Ellen saw, and reached one hand to pull me closer.

"Show him the box of chocolates Nan sent," she said. "That's good for a laugh."

I got them out of my schoolbag. "She's been saving them since last year, and they've already survived a German bombing and a house fire, so watch out."

"Ta, Louisa," Jamie rasped. "Put them in the drawer as there are no surfaces left. Ruddy female relatives and their ruddy floral tributes."

"Here's your logbook," said Ellen. "Which bit did you want to torture yourself with?"

She sat in the chair beside him, holding it where he could see it,

like a young mum reading a storybook to a small child.

"I just want to make sure the Stavanger op gets filled in properly," he said. "Get Louisa to do it—her writing's always tidy. See how I've done the other Enigma ops, look—I put a Morse *E* at the start, just a dot, to remind me which flights were connected with the coding machine. Don't want it to be too obvious."

I knelt beside Ellen with the book against the bed as I wrote out the details, at his instruction, determined I wasn't going to weep. Miss Lind watched over my shoulder. When I'd done, and blown on the ink to dry it off, I shut the book.

It felt very final. We all knew he wouldn't write in it again.

For a moment we were quiet about that.

Then Elisabeth Lind, looking down, smiled her crooked little half smile at me kneeling by the side of the bed.

"I'm Julie," she said.

"Ellen told me. After you left Windyedge." I simply couldn't think of her as anything other than Miss Lind.

"Ellen told *me* that you seem to think you're responsible for Pimms Section's flight leader being a headstrong Scots lunatic."

"I wanted so badly to help!" I wailed. "I wanted to *do* something!"

"Buckets of blood!" She sounded exactly like her brother. "You did do something, Louisa Adair! You gave us *our only Enigma machine!*"

"I could have given it to you as soon as I found it. We could have contacted your commanding officer somehow. And then maybe everything would have worked out differently, and—" I glanced at Jamie. I wasn't going to be the first to mention *again* that not a single crew in Pimms or Madeira had survived their last mission.

Miss Lind looked thoughtful. "But, you know, if you *hadn't* used it, perhaps it would have been destroyed in one of those early bombing raids, just as the papers were. Or if you hadn't ever found it, it would have still been in the Limehouse, but you wouldn't have guessed when the Luftwaffe was coming. And instead, you were always one step ahead of them. Remember the bomber you turned away in the air, that awful night of freezing fog? Maybe that bomber would have killed all of us *and* destroyed the machine at the same time, if the coded message hadn't warned you. And B-Flight would have still gone down in flames. Maybe if you hadn't

done anything it would have turned out *worse*.”

“If you hadn’t recognized Felix Baer whistling his SOS, we might have shot down his plane on Christmas Day,” Jamie put in hoarsely. “If he hadn’t thought you were Calypso, and even if they hadn’t bombed Windyedge, perhaps no one would have ever discovered where he hid the machine.”

I opened my mouth to protest, and realized they were right.

Not so much in that other, different, terrible things might have happened without my interference, but in that we just wouldn’t ever know the millions upon millions of combinations that fate’s rotor dials could have lined up.

Jamie’s sister gave me that crooked smile again. I liked her much more without the disguise.

“Anyway, this is how it’s turned out,” she said. “And I shall make sure the full story doesn’t go beyond my commanding officer. The official version is that the machine was hidden behind the gas fire in Mrs. Campbell’s best double room until I found it there just before B-Flight went to Stavanger.” She paused, and made a point of looking at us one by one until we each met her eyes. She did Jamie last, as if she thought he needed an extra dose of telling-off. “You’re all accountable for treason against the British Crown under the Official Secrets Act if you reveal a word about any of it for the next fifty years.”

“I’m not a child,” muttered Jamie. “Nor are Ellen and Louisa. You needn’t keep up your Intelligence officer act now that you’ve taken off your false eyelashes.”

“Well, I have to warn you about the Official Secrets Act, I’ve been *told* to, and I’m doing it now as I’ve got all three of you in one place and there’s no one else listening,” she said crossly. “And there’s a difference between being held accountable for treason and actually being guilty of it. Accountable means you have to be able to justify your actions. I don’t know how you’d justify *revealing* any of what you’ve been doing for the past three months, but you could probably justify *doing* it.”

“I bloody well *could* justify doing it,” said Jamie. “I’d do it again.”

“Someone *will* do it again,” I said. “Now that we’ve shared it.”

Jamie:

Louisa was going to be wasted staying at Nan's, with her head full of Morse code and her backbone of steel and her hunger for action.

I shifted my legs. It was practically impossible to sit up straighter without putting pressure on my hands. I tried not to flail; they'd all go soft on me if they thought I was in pain.

"What are you going to do next to help win the war, Louisa?" I said. "You should join the WAAF."

Louisa shook her head and gave a terrifically prim response, sounding like Phyllis.

"I'm fifteen. They'd never let me in."

I couldn't believe she'd let a little thing like that stop her.

"When's your birthday?" I persisted. "You'll have to get an adult National Registration card when you turn sixteen. Sergeant Lind here fibbed about her age when she took her driving test, and if you need anybody to pull strings for you at the recruitment office, I'd say she owes you a big favor anyway."

I couldn't understand why Louisa looked so *angry*.

And then I realized she thought I'd pushed her into a corner. She wasn't "of pure European descent." She thought the Women's Auxiliary Air Force would turn her away, the way the navy turned away her father.

"The air force lifted the color bar in 1939," I said. "I guess it wasn't done with a big welcome or a lot of fanfare, but there are a few West Indians in the RAF. I met one myself last autumn, George Archer, gunner in a Wellington bomber. Family man, lovely chap. I think the WAAF would take you."

As I watched the familiar excitement creep back into her heart-shaped face, I secretly thought that giving Louisa the tip-off that would get her into the services was perhaps my finest hour: the best thing I'd done for Britain since the war started. A bomber pilot sent night after night on missions of destruction doesn't get much opportunity to be creative.

Buckets of blood—what was *I* going to do next?

Weren't there a couple of one-armed ferry pilots in the Air Transport Auxiliary? I knew my wee sister had a friend who flew for them. Maybe she could introduce me.

It would be a while yet before the damaged bits of me healed, but the war wasn't over.

Ellen:

Louisa as a WAAF! I tried to imagine her in air-force blue and a peaked cap. I wanted to see it. I wanted to see her as an officer, bossing folk about.

I needed to shift gears, too. Under Nan Campbell's roof for fifty times as long as any other? *Shaness*—much too long.

I thought I'd apply for a bit of training. Gunnery—or those teams that raised the barrage balloons, protecting cities from enemy aircraft. Maybe even become an officer myself. I'd learned a lot watching Jamie.

The next few months wouldn't be easy, living with the Torries in Windyedge and waiting for a transfer.

But Louisa and I would have each other while we waited.

Louisa:

I remembered what Jane Warner had said about a razor and ink being all it took to fix her passport.

Rules are made to be broken, Lula.

When my sixteenth birthday comes around in the spring, I thought, and I get my new National Registration card, I have only to get rid of one stroke off the 6 and add another loop to make it an 8.

You, Jane said to me, with warmth in her wonderful rich voice, *you might be able to change things.*

I'd have to fight. I knew I'd have to fight.

But I was ready for that.

A real voyager.

We'd all have to fight. I wouldn't be alone.

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Author's Declaration of Accountability

When I started thinking about what I'd say here, I tried to remember the first spark for this story. And when I dug beyond the obvious—the Enigma machine, the defecting Germans landing in Scotland, the Blenheim crew, the coins in the pub ceiling—what I came back to was the old woman.

Believe it or not, that's what I started with. I wanted to write a story about a mysterious old woman.

Originally I just wanted to create a bond between a young person and an old person. It is mostly because I am losing, and miss deeply, my wonderful grandmother Betty Flocken and her generation—she was born in 1916 and died in 2015. In the back of my mind I was thinking of Margaret Mahy's *Memory*, which is about a troubled teen who ends up caring for a stranger with Alzheimer's disease, and Penelope Lively's *The House in Norham Gardens*, about a younger teen who has to care for her elderly aunts. But my stock in trade is World War II thrillers. How was I going to include a mysterious old person in my adventure story?

In the summer of 2014, the same summer that Betty Flocken suffered the fall that foreshadowed her decline and death six months later, I had one of the most wonderful experiences of my life: I took a flight in a World War II-era Avro Lancaster bomber. It, too, is among the last of its age, one of only two in the world that still fly, and I had a view from the gun turret as we circled over Niagara Falls. Afterward, I chatted with the pilot, Dave Rohrer, who has spent more time at the controls of a Lancaster than any wartime pilot ever did. He told me about a pub he'd visited in England near a former World War II airfield, where a wooden beam over the bar was full of coins placed there by airmen who never came back from their missions. *Dead men's money*, the bartender called it, telling Dave not to touch.

From that moment, I knew I had to write a story about those wishing coins and the bomber squadron who left them there.

When I finally got to work on the idea, I thought I could set up my young heroine and her aging companion in a pub like the one

Dave visited, near a wartime airfield. The local Royal Air Force bomber squadron could somehow get involved with the viewpoint character. I thought it would be fun (*fun* as in *I will enjoy writing this*, not as in *This story will be lighthearted*) if I explored Jamie Beaufort-Stuart's background as a bomber pilot, which is only mentioned in passing in *Code Name Verity*.

In June 2018, I received a letter from an Australian reader who reminded me that it wasn't just British and American men and women who flew in World War II, and requested that if I ever wrote a "Bomber Story," would I please remember the Australians. As it happened, I was in the midst of writing a Bomber Story. So at my correspondent's request I included Harry, Gavin, and Dougie as one of 648 Squadron's aircrews. In fact, the RAF bases in wartime Scotland consisted of very few Scots, and the rest of Scotland was full of foreigners too. There were Polish, French, and Norwegian naval units in Glasgow; Polish, French, and Canadian troops were based throughout the country; there were civilians from Belgium, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, and Spain; there were prisoner of war camps in Scotland holding both Germans and Italians. Later in the war, US military troops were also based in Scotland, of which about 10 percent were black. One wartime logging unit was made up of nine hundred men from British Honduras (now Belize).

I lived in Jamaica as a child and completed my first three years of school there, and over the past ten years I've become fascinated by the role of Caribbean men and women serving in Britain in World War II. I first became aware of them when I was writing *Code Name Verity*. I'd wanted to include a black airman at the end of that novel (and I did), because I hoped to paint in a little diversity among the mostly European and white cast of characters. My original plan was to make that airman American. But when I started digging, of course I discovered that the only black Americans to fly in World War II were the Tuskegee Airmen. They didn't fly in France and they didn't fly in bombers and they didn't fly in integrated crews, and I needed my airman to do all those things, so I made him Jamaican instead of American. Out of some sixteen thousand men and women from the Caribbean serving in the military in World War II, about five hundred were enlisted in the Royal Air Force. The United States segregated their armed forces back then; the British, however reluctantly, did not. (When the US

entered the war, the British bent over backward to accommodate American Jim Crow regulations, resulting in frustration and resentment from servicemen and local populations all over the United Kingdom.)

It wasn't just Caribbean men who volunteered to join the war effort. Considering themselves to be British subjects and motivated by patriotism, about six hundred Caribbean women joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service to support their "mother country" in World War II. Another eighty served in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. They felt that they were fighting against the more ferocious institutionalized prejudices of Nazism—despite the ironic and infuriating prejudices they faced from their own governing bodies. For example, when the British sent two hundred Caribbean servicewomen to work in Washington, DC, only white women were eligible for the assignment, so as to avoid offending the Americans.

Louisa Adair is not really based on anyone but herself, but a starting point was Lilian Bader. Bader was born in 1918, in Liverpool, England, to a West Indian father and an English mother. After both her parents died she was raised in a convent school where she stayed until the age of twenty—it took her longer than most of her peers to find work because of her color. When Britain entered World War II she joined the NAAFI (which ran military canteens), and early in 1941 she entered the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, where she was trained as an aircraft-instrument repairer, achieving the rank of acting corporal—and she even got taken up in a Royal Air Force plane so she could see flight instruments in action. Her experience of being taunted as a Nazi by a group of evacuee children who had never seen a German, or a black person, inspired Louisa's unsettling experience on the bus to Stonehenge.

Only one Jamaican (a white man) flew in the Battle of Britain, possibly the only Caribbean man to do so, though several others, some of them black, flew British fighter aircraft later in the war. The Jamaican who fought in the Battle of Britain was Pilot Officer Herbert Capstick, nineteen years old in the summer of 1940. He was the navigator in a Bristol Blenheim aircraft. After changing squadrons later in the war, he was part of a crew who sank a U-boat in 1942.

I might not have ever paid much attention to the type of plane Herbert Capstick flew, except that a chance remark of Jamie's in *Code Name Verity* forced me to create a Blenheim squadron for *The*

Enigma Game. I must have done a quick search, ten years ago, to see what kind of bombers were being flown early in the war, and assigned Jamie to Blenheims. When I began writing this book, after only a little research I soon became obsessed with these overlooked Royal Air Force light bombers.

Thousands of Bristol Blenheims were in service at the beginning of the war, fighting in both the Battle of France and the Battle of Britain; the first bombing raid against Germany was made in a Blenheim. Blenheims were the most plentiful of the RAF's aircraft as the war began, and more aircrews were lost flying them than any other type of RAF plane. As Jamie mentions, only one Blenheim pilot, Flying Officer Reginald Peacock, became an official ace by shooting down five German aircraft during the fierce air wars of 1940. I didn't make up the story of the Blenheim crew who flew all the way back to their own base after a mission, shut down the engines, and died on the runway before they were able to climb out.

There is only one Blenheim flying today, rebuilt from parts, and based at the Imperial War Museum in Duxford, England. A Canadian version of the Blenheim known as the Bolingbroke is currently being restored to "ground-running condition" at the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum in Hamilton, Ontario, and a few other examples survive in static museum exhibits. I spent a day checking out the Blenheim on permanent display in the RAF Museum at Hendon, London, where the docent was kind enough to remove the front cockpit escape hatch so I could stick my head up into the nose of the plane (as Jamie does when he's inspecting 648 Squadron's aircraft in the rain) and try to imagine what it might be like to fly in it. Standing next to this Blenheim's wing, with my head level with the rear gunner's turret, I found my heart aching at how *small* the plane is. It is *much* smaller than other twin-engined bombers. It is two feet shorter than a Spitfire fighter plane and only a foot taller than a Messerschmitt 109 fighter. Its crew of three must have been tightly packed. And as one Blenheim pilot put it, if you met German fighter aircraft while you were flying, you didn't come home.

But the RAF continued to use these planes well into the war, in Africa and the Far East as well as at home. As the war progressed, the armor and armament improved, and the Blenheims were often equipped with early and experimental radar. Jamie's fictional 648

Squadron is most closely based on the real 248 Squadron, who also flew out of Scotland over the North Sea in the winter of 1940–1941. In real life, 248 Squadron did indeed pick up foreign language radio transmissions which they believed to be German.

The idea of overhearing German radio transmissions leads me to “Odysseus” and his mission. Felix Baer’s landings in Scotland were inspired by two unrelated wartime incidents: the flight of Rudolf Hess made on 10–11 May 1941, and the interception of a German bomber whose crew defected to the United Kingdom on 9 May 1943. Rudolf Hess was, believe it or not, Hitler’s Deputy Führer when he flew to Scotland in a Messerschmitt 110 Luftwaffe night-fighter fitted with long-range fuel tanks. Hess had consulted the aircraft designer himself, Willy Messerschmitt, about modifications and training on the aircraft to enable him to make the flight. To this day, no one is really sure what Hess hoped to achieve. Theories are that he might have had key information to deliver about Germany’s imminent invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941; or he may have been invited by British Intelligence; or he may have acted as an emissary on behalf of someone else.

Whatever his motive, his aircraft was spotted by a British detection station as he approached the northeast coast of England. Spitfire fighter planes were scrambled to go after him, but no one found him in the air. Hess apparently ran out of fuel and parachuted out of his Messerschmitt, which crashed southeast of Glasgow in Scotland (the remains of his plane are on display in the Imperial War Museum in London). He was found on the ground by a local farmer, given a cup of tea, and made a prisoner by the Home Guard. He insisted he wanted to talk to the Duke of Hamilton, saying that he hoped to negotiate a peace treaty between Britain and Germany. That didn’t happen. Hess doesn’t seem to have acted under anyone’s orders but his own; the result of his failed mission was that he spent the rest of his life in prison, taking his own life in 1987 at the age of ninety-three—not his first attempt.

Obviously Felix Baer is not based on Rudolf Hess himself, although Hess’s flight made me feel that Baer’s was plausible. But the real inspiration for “Odysseus” and his collaboration with British Intelligence came from an “Individual History” report describing a German bomber, a Junkers 88, now in the Royal Air Force Museum Cosford, in England. I’ve known about the events leading to the capture of this aircraft for some time—at least ten

years—because I used the description of the RAF interception of this Ju-88 as source material for an interception scene in *Rose Under Fire*. On 9 May 1943, this Luftwaffe plane, with its crew of three, flew from Denmark via Norway and was then escorted by a group of Spitfires into Dyce near Aberdeen (the location of my fictional Deeside). One of the German airmen in the Ju-88 had been brought along at gunpoint, unwillingly; the other two may well have been working for British Intelligence since 1940. Intriguingly, it has been suggested that the pilot, Heinrich (or Herbert) Schmitt, may have landed in the UK twice before, in February and May 1941, both times on clandestine intelligence missions.

The RAF continued to fly this captured Junkers 88 on experimental operations throughout the war, and it was a *gift* for the British and the other Allied forces because it contained an up-to-the-minute German radar set, which allowed the RAF to make some key adjustments to the existing technology that hid their own bomber aircraft from enemy detection. Despite the importance of this discovery, the details of the tech are so stunningly obscure and complex that I knew I couldn't possibly use them to create a gripping read. I asked my husband to brainstorm ideas about an alternative secret for my German resistance pilot to sneak into Britain, something which could be considered equally game-changing for the war effort but a bit more exciting. He immediately suggested an Enigma machine.

I'm grateful to Mark Baldwin for his energetic and enlightening lecture on the use of the Enigma machine, and for the brief opportunity to touch those keys myself and see how the rotors work. The first Enigma machine to come into the possession of British Intelligence in wartime was captured in May 1941, not February 1941 as in this novel. I hope readers will give me a little poetic license over this slight anachronism. The timing of *The Enigma Game* was dictated very strictly by some of the less sensational events of *Code Name Verity*; when I sat down to write, it was already "canon" that Jamie had lost his fingers and toes to frostbite after ditching a Blenheim in the North Sea sometime before March 1941. Perhaps Felix Baer's Enigma machine was kept especially secret, or got snarled in administrative red tape, as Jamie worried it might. British Intelligence did make some shocking blunders; it's not impossible.

It's increasingly the case that my novels feel collaborative

rather than an individual effort, and I owe a debt of gratitude to my international team of editors: Hannah Allaman, Emily Meehan, Lynne Missen, Ellen Holgate, and Lucy Mackay Sim, particularly Hannah and Lucy, who whipped this book into shape over three intense drafts. I'm also grateful to the talented writer Catherine Johnson, who graciously made time at short notice to give a careful reading of my manuscript and share her experiences as the daughter of Jamaican and British parents. And of course I would not be the writer I am today without the continued support of my agent and dear friend, Ginger Clark. The same is true of my husband, Tim Gatland, who pointed out that I needed to run the Aberdeen rail line inland around my fictional RAF Windyedge, and who accompanied me on more than one reconnaissance flight along the North Sea coast of Aberdeenshire, even indulging me in a landing at "Deeside."

And I want to acknowledge and remember the Blenheim airmen who inspired me and for whom my heart is eternally sore, in particular the young crew of 21 Squadron's Blenheim R3914: pilot Harry Collinge, observer Douglas Osborne, and wireless operator/air gunner Albert Moore. They were all between twenty and twenty-three years of age when they lost their lives on the night of 26–27 November 1940, crashing into a hillside in the north of England on their way home from an attack on a power station in Cologne, Germany. They were off course and didn't have a working radio. Their plane was seen in flames before it hit the ground, but since they made it back to Britain they may well have been shot down by British anti-aircraft gunners, mistaking them for the enemy in the dark.

LEST WE FORGET.

Elizabeth Wein
Mt. Gretna, Pennsylvania
July 2019

Further reading:

- Bourne, Stephen: *The Motherland Calls: Britain's Black Servicemen & Women 1939–45*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2012. It's difficult to find accessible studies on this subject, but Bourne's book contains interesting personal accounts as well as a good list of films and television documentaries about black servicemen in Britain (see pages 134–135).
- Chappell, Connery. *Island of Barbed Wire: Internment on the Isle of Man in World War Two*. London: Robert Hale, 1984. This book gives a good overview of the British internment of aliens during the war.
- Nesbit, Roy Conyers and Georges van Acker. *The Flight of Rudolf Hess: Myths and Reality*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1999. Hess was an enigmatic character who tried, and failed, to change the course of the war in an attempt to personally broker a peace between Britain and Germany.
- Panton, Alastair and Victoria Panton Bacon. *Six Weeks of Blenheim Summer: One Pilot's Extraordinary Account of the Battle of France*. London: Penguin Books, 2018 (2014). This autobiographical account of flying Bristol Blenheims in wartime is fabulously readable and very moving.

A Handful of Interesting Links:

- “Caribbean Aircrew in the RAF during WW2” contains a record of West Indians who joined the Royal Air Force during World War II, with photographs and lists of documentaries and news stories: www.caribbeanaircrew-ww2.com
- “Was the RAF Especially Receptive to Black Servicemen in World War Two?” is an edited transcript of a podcast on *Dan Snow's History Hit* entitled “Pilots of the Caribbean with Peter Devitt,” first broadcast on 24 June 2018: <https://www.historyhit.com/was-the-raf-especially-receptive-to-black-servicemen-in-world-war-two/>
- Stephen Bourne has written a detailed obituary for Lilian Bader (1918–2015), one of the first black women to serve in Britain's

armed forces: www.voice-online.co.uk/article/obituary-war-hero-lilian-bader-1918-2015

This web page from the Battle of Britain London Monument is a tribute to Herbert Capstick, the only Jamaican to fly in the Battle of Britain: <http://www.bbm.org.uk/airmen/Capstick.htm>
“Disaster at Balham Tube Station” is an account of the bombing raid that flooded the London Underground on 14 October 1940, with iconic photographs of the London bus that fell into the bomb crater: <http://ww2today.com/14th-october-1940-disaster-at-balham-tube-station>

The Library and Archive Service on the Isle of Man provides an online guide to their collection concerning the island’s role in the internment of aliens during World War II: <https://manxnationalheritage.im/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/WWII-Internment-Sheet-Library-and-Archive-Service-Digital.pdf>

This “Individual History” written by Andrew Simpson is a Royal Air Force Museum document describing the interception of a Luftwaffe Junkers 88 bomber in May 1943. The aircraft described has been in the collection of the RAF Museum in Cosford since 2017 (A/C Serial No. W/NR. 360043, Section 2B): <https://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/documents/collections/78-AF-953-Junkers-Ju88-R1.pdf>

The Aircrew Remembered website contains an account of Heinrich (Herbert) Schmitt’s defection to the UK with his Junkers 88 aircrew: <http://www.aircrewremembered.com/schmid-herbert-defection.html>

The only Bristol Blenheim flying today was restored by the Aircraft Restoration Company. The aircraft is currently based at the Imperial War Museum in Duxford, England: <https://www.aircraftrestorationcompany.com/blenheim>

The Blenheim Society website: <http://blenheimsociety.com/>

All links were current in January 2020.

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CODE NAME VERITY



Elizabeth Wein

with what V.L. remembers of it. I want to know what I GET TO IMAGINE MY GREAT DAD WAS LIKE. I am not a very reasonable, as though I were a scientist, to be pre-
-decided (not by me) that my beloved father makes
it ragged, so they washed and perched my blouse
as flash-pasted to find they still had it—I suppose
a bareheaded code in the washing. There it is, not
because no one trusts me with buttons. I am not
petty. I was also afraid to wash my face. I
hide the pencils as I wash my face. I am not
expected kerosene has
its, but that just adds
very reeked of kerosene
us American soap.
(Apart from the obvious, I don't know if
I don't have been from this hotel. I don't know if
myself, but I stab someone with the pen. I am not a
succeeded in making me cry, but otherwise it is a
king beneath the Teutonic Machine gun. I am not a
stry table with some harmless, I am not a
rail and bus timetables and
up with an artificial smile.
ugh I were playing the Sax.
radio announcer introduced me.
th a stick and a prodigious hope. I am not a

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name
verity

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Passive resisters must
understand that they are
as important as saboteurs.

—*SOE Secret Operations Manual*,
"Methods of Passive Resistance"

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I AM A COWARD.

I wanted to be heroic and I pretended I was. I have always been good at pretending. I spent the first twelve years of my life playing at the Battle of Stirling Bridge with my five big brothers—and even though I am a girl, they let me be William Wallace, who is supposed to be one of our ancestors, because I did the most rousing battle speeches. God, I tried hard last week. My God, *I tried*. But now I know I am a coward. After the ridiculous deal I made with SS-Hauptsturmführer von Linden, I know I am a coward. And I'm going to give you anything you ask, everything I can remember. Absolutely *Every Last Detail*.

Here is the deal we made. I'm putting it down to keep it straight in my own mind. "Let's try this," the Hauptsturmführer said to me. "How could you be bribed?" And I said I wanted my clothes back.

It seems petty, now. I am sure he was expecting my answer to be something defiant—"Give me Freedom" or "Victory"—or something generous, like "Stop toying with that wretched French Resistance laddie and give him a dignified and merciful death." Or at least something more directly connected to my present circumstance, like "Please let me go to sleep" or "Feed me" or "Get rid of this sodding iron rail you have kept tied against my spine for the past three days." But I was prepared to go sleepless and starving and upright for a good while yet if only I didn't have to do it in my underwear—rather foul and damp at times, and SO EMBARRASSING. The warmth and dignity of my flannel skirt and woolly sweater are worth far more to me now than patriotism or integrity.

So von Linden sold my clothes back to me piece by piece. Except my scarf and stockings, of course, which were taken away early on to prevent me strangling myself with them (I did try). The pullover cost me *four sets of wireless code*—the full lot of encoding poems, passwords, and frequencies. Von Linden let

me have the pullover back on credit right away. It was waiting for me in my cell when they finally untied me at the end of that dreadful three days, though I was incapable of getting the damned thing on at first; but even just dragged over top of me like a shawl it was comforting. Now that I've managed to get into it at last, I don't think I shall ever take it off again. The skirt and blouse cost rather less than the pullover, and it was only one code set apiece for my shoes.

There are eleven sets in all. The last one was supposed to buy my slip. Notice how he's worked it that I get the clothes from the *outside in*, so I have to go through the torment of *undressing* in front of everybody every time another item is given back to me. He's the only one who doesn't watch—he threatened to take it all away from me again when I suggested he was missing a fabulous show. It was the first time the accumulated damage has really been on display, and I wish he would have *looked* at his masterpiece—at my arms particularly—also the first time I have been able to stand in a while, which I wanted to show off to him. Anyway, I have decided to do without my slip, which also saves me the trouble of stripping again to put it on, and in exchange for the last code set I have bought myself a supply of ink and paper—and some time.

Von Linden has said I have two weeks and that I can have as much paper as I need. All I have to do is cough up everything I can remember about the British War Effort. And I'm going to. Von Linden resembles Captain Hook in that he is rather an upright sort of gentleman in spite of his being a brute, and I am quite Pan-like in my naïve confidence that he will play by the rules and keep his word. So far, he *has*. To start off my confession, he gave me this lovely creamy embossed stationery from the Château de Bordeaux, the Bordeaux Castle Hotel, which is what this building used to be. (I would not have believed a French hotel could become so forbiddingly bleak if I had not seen the barred shutters and padlocked doors with my own eyes. But you have also managed to make the whole beautiful city of Ormaie look bleak.)

It is rather a lot to be resting on a single code set, but in addition to my treasonous account I have also promised von Linden my soul, although I do not think he takes this seriously.

Anyway, it will be a relief to write *anything* that isn't connected with code. I'm so dreadfully sick of spewing wireless code. Only when we'd put all those lists to paper did I realize what a huge supply of code I do actually have in me.

It's jolly astonishing, really.

YOU STUPID NAZI BASTARDS.

I'm just damned. I am utterly and completely damned. You'll shoot me at the end no matter what I do, because that's what you do to enemy agents. It's what *we* do to enemy agents. After I write this confession, if you *don't* shoot me and I ever make it home, I'll be tried and shot as a collaborator anyway. But I look at all the dark and twisted roads ahead and this is the easy one, the obvious one. What's in my future—a tin of kerosene poured down my throat and a match held to my lips? Scalpel and acid, like the Resistance boy who won't talk? My living skeleton packed up in a cattle wagon with two hundred desperate others, carted off God knows where, to die of thirst before we get there? No. I'm not traveling those roads. This is the easiest. The others are too frightening even to look down.

I am going to write in English. I don't have the vocabulary for a warfare account in French, and I can't write fluently enough in German. Someone will have to translate for Hauptsturmführer von Linden. Fräulein Engel can do it. She speaks English very well. She is the one who explained to me that paraffin and kerosene are the same thing. We call it paraffin at home, but the Americans call it kerosene, and that is more or less what the word sounds like in French and German too.

(About the paraffin, kerosene, whatever it is. I do not really believe you have a liter of kerosene to waste on me. Or do you get it on the black market? How do you claim the expense? *1 lt. highly explosive fuel for execution of British spy.* Anyway, I will do my best to spare you the expense.)

One of the first items on the very long list I have been given to think about including in my confession is Location of British Airfields for Invasion of Europe. Fräulein Engel will confirm that I burst out laughing when I read that. You really think I know a damned thing about where the Allies are planning to launch their invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe? I

am in the Special Operations Executive because I can speak French and German and am good at making up stories, and I am a prisoner in the Ormaie Gestapo HQ because I have no sense of direction whatsoever. Bearing in mind that the people who trained me encouraged my blissful ignorance of airfields just so I *couldn't* tell you such a thing if you *did* catch me, and not forgetting that I wasn't even told the name of the airfield we took off from when I came here: let me remind you that I had been in France less than 48 hours before that obliging agent of yours had to stop me being run over by a French van full of French chickens because I'd looked the wrong way before crossing the street. Which shows how cunning the Gestapo are. "This person I've pulled from beneath the wheels of certain death was expecting traffic to travel on the left side of the road. Therefore she must be British, and is likely to have parachuted into Nazi-occupied France out of an Allied plane. I shall now arrest her as a spy."

So, I have no sense of direction. In some of us it is a TRAGIC FLAW, and there is no point in me trying to direct you to Locations of Any Airfields Anywhere. Not without someone giving me the coordinates. I could make them up, perhaps, and be convincing about it, to buy myself more time, but you would catch on eventually.

Aircraft Types in Operational use is also on this list of things I am to tell you. God, this is a funny list. If I knew or cared a damned thing about aircraft types I would be flying planes for the Air Transport Auxiliary, like Maddie, the pilot who dropped me here, or working as a fitter or a mechanic. Not cravenly coughing up facts and figures for the Gestapo. (I will not mention my cowardice again because it is beginning to make me feel indecent. Also I do not want you to get bored and take this handsome paper away and go back to holding my face in a basin of ice water until I pass out.)

No, wait, I do know some aircraft types. I will tell you all the aircraft types I know, starting with the Puss Moth. That was the first aircraft my friend Maddie ever flew. In fact it was the first aircraft she ever had a ride in, and even the first one she ever got close to. And the story of how I came to be here starts with Maddie. I don't think I'll ever know how I ended up

carrying her National Registration card and pilot's license instead of my own ID when you picked me up, but if I tell you about Maddie you'll understand why we flew here together.

AIRCRAFT TYPES

Maddie is properly Margaret Brodatt. You have her ID, you know her name. Brodatt is not a Northern English name; it is a Russian name, I think, because her grandfather came from Russia. But Maddie is pure Stockport. Unlike me, she has an excellent sense of direction. She can navigate by the stars, and by dead reckoning, but I think she learned to use her sense of direction properly because her granddad gave her a motorbike for her sixteenth birthday. Then Maddie was away out of Stockport and up the unmade lanes on the high moors of the Pennine hills. You can see the Pennines all around the city of Stockport, green and bare with fast-moving stripes of cloud and sunlight gliding overhead like a Technicolor moving picture. I know because I went on leave for a weekend and stayed with Maddie and her grandparents, and she took me on her motorbike up the Dark Peak, one of the most wonderful afternoons of my life. It was winter and the sun came out only for about five minutes and even then the sleet didn't stop falling—it was because the weather was forecast so unflyable that she had the three days off. But for five minutes Cheshire seemed green and sparkling. Maddie's granddad owns a bike shop and he got some black market petrol for her specially when I visited. I am putting this down (even though it's nothing to do with Aircraft Types) because it proves that I know what I'm talking about when I describe what it was like for Maddie to be alone at the top of the world, deafened by the roar of four winds and two cylinders, with all the Cheshire plain and its green fields and red chimneys thrown at her feet like a tartan picnic blanket.

Maddie had a friend called Beryl who had left school, and in the summer of 1938 Beryl was working in the cotton mill at Ladderal, and they liked to take Sunday picnics on Maddie's

motorbike because it was the only time they saw each other anymore. Beryl rode with her arms tight around Maddie's waist, like I did that time. No goggles for Beryl, or for me, though Maddie had her own. On this particular June Sunday they rode up through the lanes between the drystone walls that Beryl's laboring ancestors had built, and over the top of Highdown Rise, with mud up their bare shins. Beryl's best skirt was ruined that day, and her dad made her pay for a new one out of her next week's wages.

"I love your granddad," Beryl shouted in Maddie's ear. "I wish he was mine." (I wished that too.) "Fancy him giving you a Silent Superb for your birthday!"

"It's not so silent," Maddie shouted back over her shoulder. "It wasn't new when I got it, and it's five years old now. I've had to rebuild the engine this year."

"Won't your granddad do it for you?"

"He wouldn't even give it to me until I'd taken the engine apart. I have to do it myself or I can't have it."

"I still love him," Beryl shouted.

They tore along the high green lanes of Highdown Rise, along tractor ruts that nearly bounced them over drystone field walls and into a bed of mire and nettles and sheep. I remember and I know what it must have been like. Every now and then, around a corner or at the crest of a hump in the hill, you can see the bare green chain of the Pennines stretching serenely to the west, or the factory chimneys of south Manchester scrawling the blue north sky with black smoke.

"And you'll have a skill," Beryl yelled.

"A what?"

"A *skill*."

"Fixing engines!" Maddie howled.

"It's a skill. Better than loading shuttles."

"You're getting paid for loading shuttles," Maddie yelled back. "I don't get paid." The lane ahead was rutted with rain-filled potholes. It looked like a miniature landscape of Highland lochs. Maddie slowed the bike to a putter and finally had to stop. She put her feet down on solid earth, her skirt rucked up

to her thighs, still feeling the Superb's reliable and familiar rumble all through her body. "Who'll give a girl a job fixing engines?" Maddie said. "Gran wants me to learn to type. At least you're earning."

They had to get off the bike to walk it along the ditch-filled lane. Then there was another rise, and they came to a farm gate set between field boundaries, and Maddie leaned the motorbike against the stone wall so they could eat their sandwiches. They looked at each other and laughed at the mud.

"What'll your dad say!" Maddie exclaimed.

"What'll your gran!"

"She's used to it."

Beryl's word for picnic was "baggin," Maddie said. Doorstep slices of granary loaf Beryl's auntie baked for three families every Wednesday, and pickled onions as big as apples. Maddie's sandwiches were on rye bread from the baker's in Reddyke, where her grandmother sent her every Friday. The pickled onions stopped Maddie and Beryl having a conversation, because chewing made so much crunching in their heads they couldn't hear each other talk, and they had to be careful swallowing so they wouldn't be asphyxiated by an accidental blast of vinegar. (Perhaps Chief-Storm-Captain von Linden might find pickled onions useful as a persuasive tool. And your prisoners would get fed at the same time.)

(Fräulein Engel instructs me to put down here, for Captain von Linden to know when he reads it, that I have wasted 20 minutes of the time given me because here in my story I laughed at my own stupid joke about the pickled onions and broke the pencil point. We had to wait for someone to bring a knife to sharpen it because Miss Engel is not allowed to leave me by myself. And then I wasted another 5 minutes weeping after I snapped off the new point because Miss E. had sharpened it very close to my face, flicking the shavings into my eyes while SS-Scharführer Thibaut held my head still, and it made me terribly nervous. I am not laughing or crying now and will try not to press so hard after this.)

At any rate, think of Maddie before the war, free and at home with her mouth full of pickled onion—she could only

point and choke when a spluttering, smoking aircraft hove into view above their heads and circled the field they were overlooking as they perched on the gate. That aircraft was a Puss Moth.

I can tell you a bit about Puss Moths. They are fast, light monoplanes—you know, only one set of wings—the Tiger Moth is a biplane and has two sets (another type I have just remembered). You can fold the Puss Moth's wings back for trucking the machine around or storing. It has a super view from the cockpit, and can seat two passengers as well as the pilot. I have been a passenger in one a couple of times. I think the upgraded version is called a Leopard Moth (that's three aircraft I have named in one paragraph!).

This Puss Moth circling the field at Highdown Rise, the first Puss Moth Maddie ever came across, was choking to death. Maddie said it was like having a ringside seat at the circus. With the plane at three hundred feet, she and Beryl could see every detail of the machine in miniature: every wire, every strut of its pair of canvas wings, the flicker of the wooden propeller blades as they spun ineffectively in the wind. Great blue clouds of smoke billowed from the exhaust.

"He's on fire!" screamed Beryl, in a fit of delighted panic.

"He's not on fire. He's burning oil," Maddie said, because she knows these things. "If he has any sense, he'll shut everything off and it'll stop. Then he can glide down."

They watched. Maddie's prediction came true: the engine stopped and the smoke drifted away, and now the pilot was clearly planning to put his damaged rig down in the field right in front of them. It was a grazing field, unplowed, unmown, without any livestock in it. The wings above their heads cut out the sun for a second with the sweep and billow of a sailing yacht. The aircraft's final pass pulled all the litter of their lunch out into the field, brown crusts and brown paper fluttering in the blue smoke like the devil's confetti.

Maddie said it would have been a good landing if it had been on an aerodrome. In the field the wounded flying machine bounced haplessly over the unmown grass for thirty yards. Then it tipped up gracefully onto its nose.

Maddie broke into applause. Beryl grabbed her hands and smacked one of them.

“You gormless cow! He might be hurt! Oh, what shall we do?”

Maddie hadn’t meant to clap. She had done it without thinking. I can picture her blowing the curling black hair out of her eyes, with her lower lip jutting out before she jumped down from the gate and hopped over the green tussocks to the downed plane.

There were no flames. Maddie scaled her way up the Puss Moth’s nose to get at the cockpit, and put one of her hobnailed shoes through the fabric that covered the fuselage (I think that’s what the body of the plane is called), and I’ll bet she cringed; she hadn’t meant to do that either. She was feeling very hot and bothered by the time she unlatched the door, expecting a lecture from the aircraft’s owner, and was shamefully relieved to find the pilot hanging upside down in half-undone harness straps and clearly stone-cold unconscious. Maddie glanced over the alien engine controls. No oil pressure (she told me all this). Throttle, out. Off. Good enough. Maddie untangled the harness and let the pilot slither to the ground.

Beryl was there to catch the dragging weight of the pilot’s senseless body. It was easier for Maddie to get down off the plane than it had been for her to get up, just a light hop to the ground. She unbuckled the pilot’s helmet and goggles; she and Beryl had both done first aid in Girl Guides, for all that’s worth, and knew enough to make sure the casualty could breathe.

Beryl began to giggle.

“Who’s the gormless cow!” Maddie exclaimed.

“It’s a girl!” Beryl laughed. “It’s a girl!”

Beryl stayed with the unconscious girl pilot while Maddie rode her Silent Superb to the farm to get help. She found two big strong lads her own age shoveling cow dung, and the farmer’s wife sorting first early potatoes and cursing at a cotillion of girls who were doing a huge jigsaw on the old stone kitchen floor (it was Sunday, or they’d have been boiling laundry). A rescue squad was dispatched. Maddie was sent farther down the lane

on her bike to the bottom of the hill, where there was a pub and a phone box.

“She’ll need an ambulance, tha knows, love,” the farmer’s wife had said to Maddie kindly. “She’ll need to go to hospital if she’s been flying an airplane.”

The words rattled around in Maddie’s head all the way to the telephone. Not “She’ll need to go to hospital if she’s been injured,” but, “She’ll need to go to hospital if she’s been flying an airplane.”

A flying girl! thought Maddie. A girl flying an airplane!

No, she corrected herself; a girl *not* flying a plane. A girl tipping up a plane in a sheep field.

But she flew it first. She had to be able to fly it in order to land it (or crash it).

The leap seemed logical to Maddie.

I’ve never crashed my motorbike, she thought. I could fly an airplane.

There are a few more types of aircraft that I know, but what comes to mind is the Lysander. That is the plane Maddie was flying when she dropped me here. She was actually supposed to land the plane, not dump me out of it in the air. We got fired at on the way in, and for a while the tail was in flames and she couldn’t control it properly, and she made me bail out before she tried to land. I didn’t see her come down. But you showed me the photos you took at the site, so I know she *has* crashed an airplane by now. Still, you can hardly blame it on the pilot when her plane gets hit by anti-aircraft fire.

SOME BRITISH SUPPORT FOR ANTI-SEMITISM

The Puss Moth crash was on Sunday. Beryl was back to work at the mill in Ladderal the next day. My heart twists up and shrivels with envy so black and painful that I spoiled half this page with tears before I realized they were falling, to think of Beryl’s long life of loading shuttles and raising snotty babies with a beery lad in an industrial suburb of Manchester. Of

course that was in 1938 and they have all been bombed to bits since, so perhaps Beryl and her kiddies are dead already, in which case my tears of envy are very selfish. I am sorry about the paper. Miss E. is looking over my shoulder as I write, and tells me not to interrupt my story with any more apologies.

Over the next week Maddie pieced together the pilot's story in a storm of newspaper clippings with the mental wolfishness of Lady Macbeth. The pilot's name was Dymrna Wythenshawe (I remember her name because it is so silly). She was the spoiled youngest daughter of Sir Somebody-or-other Wythenshawe. On Friday there was a flurry of outrage in the evening paper because as soon as she was released from hospital she started giving joyrides in her other airplane (a Dragon Rapide—how clever am I) while the Puss Moth was being mended. Maddie sat on the floor in her granddad's shed next to her beloved Silent Superb, which needed a lot of tinkering to keep it in a fit state for weekend outings, and fought with the newspaper. There were pages and pages of gloom about the immediate likelihood of war between Japan and China, and the growing likelihood of war in Europe. The nose-down Puss Moth in the farmer's field on Highdown Rise was last week's news, though; there were no pictures of the plane on Friday, only a grinning mug shot of the aviatrix herself, looking happy and windblown and much, much prettier than that idiot Fascist Oswald Mosley, whose sneering face glared out at Maddie from the prime spot at the top of the page. Maddie covered him up with her mug of cocoa and thought about the quickest way to get to Catton Park Aerodrome. It was a good distance, but tomorrow was Saturday again.

Maddie was sorry, the next morning, that she hadn't paid more attention to the Oswald Mosley story. He was there, there in Stockport, speaking in front of St. Mary's on the edge of the Saturday market, and his idiot Fascist followers were having their own march to meet him, starting at the town hall and ending up at St. Mary's, causing traffic and human mayhem. They had by then toned down their anti-Semitism a bit and this rally was supposed to be in the name of Peace, believe it or not, trying to convince everybody that it would be a good idea to keep things cordial with the idiot Fascists in Germany. The Mosleyites were no longer allowed to wear their tastelessly

symbolic black shirts—there was now a law in place about public marching in political uniforms, mainly to stop the Mosleyites causing riots like the ones they started with their marches through Jewish neighborhoods in London. But they were going along to cheer for Mosley anyway. There was a happy crowd of his lovers and an angry crowd of his haters. There were women with baskets trying to get their shopping done at the Saturday market. There were policemen. There was livestock—some of the policemen were on horseback, and there was a herd of sheep being shunted through, also on the way to market, and a horse-drawn milk cart stuck in the middle of the sheep. There were dogs. Probably there were cats and rabbits and chickens and ducks too.

Maddie could not get across the Stockport Road (I don't know what it's really called. Perhaps that's its right name because it's the main road in from the south. You should not rely on any of my directions). Maddie waited and waited on the edge of the simmering crowd, looking for a gap. After twenty minutes she began to get annoyed. There were people pressing against her from behind now, as well. She tried to turn her motorbike around, walking it by the handlebars, and ran into someone.

“Oi! Mind where you're pushing that bike!”

“Sorry!” Maddie looked up.

It was a crowd of thugs, black-shirted for the rally even though they could get arrested for it, hair slicked back with Brylcreem like a bunch of airmen. They looked Maddie up and down gleefully, pretty sure she would be easy bait.

“Nice bike.”

“Nice legs!”

One of them giggled through his nose. “Nice __.”

He used an ugly, unspeakable word, and I won't bother to write it because I don't think any of you would know what it means in English, and I certainly do not know the French or German for it. The thuggish lad used it like a goading stick, and it worked. Maddie shoved the front wheel of the bike past the one she had hit in the first place, and knocked into him again, and he grabbed the handlebars with his own big fists between

her hands.

Maddie held on. They struggled for a moment over the motorbike. The boy refused to let go, and his mates laughed.

“What’s a lass like you need with a big toy like this? Where’d you get it?”

“At the bike shop, where d’you think!”

“Brodatt’s,” said one of them. There was only one on that side of town.

“Sells bikes to Jews, he does.”

“Maybe it’s a Jew’s bike.”

You probably don’t know it, but Manchester and its smoky suburbs have got quite a large Jewish population, and nobody minds. Well, obviously some idiot Fascists do mind, but I think you see what I mean. They came from Russia and Poland and later Roumania and Austria, all Eastern Europe, all through the nineteenth century. The bike shop whose customers were in question happened to be Maddie’s granddad’s bike shop that he’d had for the last thirty years. He’d done quite well out of it, well enough to keep Maddie’s stylish gran in the manner to which she is accustomed, and they live in a large old house in Grove Green on the edge of the city and have a gardener and a daily girl to do the housekeeping. Anyway, when this lot started slinging venom at Maddie’s granddad’s shop, Maddie unwisely engaged in battle with them and said, “Does it always take all three of you to complete a thought? Or can you each do it without your mates if you have enough time to think it over first?”

They pushed the bike over. It took Maddie down with it. Because bullying is what idiot Fascists like best.

But there was a swell of noisy outrage from other people in the crowded street, and the little gang of thugs laughed again and moved on. Maddie could hear the one lad’s distinctive nasal whinny even after his back had become anonymous.

More people than had knocked her down came to her aid, a laborer and a girl with a pram, and a kiddie and two women with shopping baskets. They hadn’t fought or interfered, but they helped Maddie up and dusted her off, and the workman ran loving hands down the Silent Superb’s fender. “Tha’s not

hurt, miss?"

"Nice bike!"

That was the kiddie. His mum said quickly, "Oi, you hush," because it was a perfect echo of the black-shirted youth who had pushed Maddie over.

"'Tis nice," said the man.

"It's getting old," Maddie said modestly, but pleased.

"Ruddy vandals."

"Tha wants to get those knees seen to, love," advised one of the ladies with baskets.

Maddie thought to herself, thinking about airplanes: Just you wait, you idiot Fascists. I am going to get me a bigger toy than this bike.

Maddie's faith in humanity was restored and she pushed her way out of the crowd and set off down the cobbled back lanes of Stockport. There was no one here but kiddies playing street football in screaming bunches, and harassed big sisters with their hair tied up in dustcloths, ungraciously shaking out rugs and scrubbing front doorsteps while their mothers shopped. I swear I shall weep with envy if I keep thinking about them, bombed to bits or otherwise.

Fräulein Engel has been looking over my shoulder once again and has asked me to stop writing "idiot Fascist," because she thinks Hauptsturmführer von Linden will not like it. I think she is a bit scared of Capt. von Linden (who can blame her?), and I think Scharführer Thibaut is scared of him too.

LOCATION OF BRITISH AIRFIELDS

I can't really believe you need me to tell you that Catton Park Aerodrome is in Ilsmere Port, because for the last ten years it has been just about the busiest airfield in the north of England. They build planes there. Before the war it had a posh civil flying club, and it has also been a Royal Air Force base for years. The local Royal Air Force squadron has been flying bombers from that field since 1936. Your guess is as good as

mine, and probably a lot better, as to what they are using it for now (I don't doubt it's surrounded with barrage balloons and anti-aircraft guns). When Maddie pulled up there that Saturday morning she stood for a moment goggling gormlessly (her word), first at the car park, which contained the biggest collection of expensive cars she'd ever seen in one place, and then at the sky, which contained the biggest collection of airplanes. She leaned against the fence to watch. After a few minutes she worked out that most of the planes seemed to fly in a kind of pattern, taking it in turns to land and roar away again. Half an hour later she was still watching, and could tell that one of the pilots was a beginner and his machine always bounced six feet in the air after touching down before properly connecting with the ground, and another one was practicing absolutely insane aerobatic maneuvers, and another one was giving rides to people—once around the airfield, five minutes in the air, back down, hand over your two shillings and swap your goggles with the next customer, please.

It was a very overwhelming place in that uneasy peacetime when military and civil pilots took it in turns to use the runway, but Maddie was determined, and followed the signs to the flying club. She found the person she was looking for by accident—easily, really, because Dympna Wythenshawe was the only idle aviator on the field, lounging by herself in a long row of faded deck chairs lined up in front of the pilots' clubhouse. Maddie did not recognize the pilot. She looked nothing like either the glamorous mug shot from the papers or the unconscious helmeted casualty she had been when Maddie left her that Sunday past. Dympna didn't recognize Maddie, either, but she called out jovially, "Are you hoping for a spin?"

She spoke in a cultured accent of money and privilege. Rather like mine, without the Scottish burr. Probably not as privileged as mine, but more moneyed. Anyway, it made Maddie instantly feel like a serving girl.

"I'm looking for Dympna Wythenshawe," said Maddie. "I just wanted to see how she's getting on after—after last week."

"She's fine." The elegant creature smiled pleasantly.

"I found her," Maddie blurted.

"She's right as rain," Dympna said, offering a languid lily-

white hand that had certainly never changed an oil filter (my lily-white hands *have*, I would like you to know, but only under strict supervision). “She’s right as rain. She’s me.”

Maddie shook hands.

“Take a pew,” Dymrna drawled (just imagine she’s me, raised in a castle and educated at a Swiss boarding school, only a lot taller and not sniveling all the time). She waved to the empty deck chairs. “There’s plenty of room.”

She was dressed as though she were going on safari, and contrived to be glamorous about it, too. She gave private instruction as well as joyrides. She was the only woman pilot at the aerodrome, certainly the only woman instructor.

“When my darling Puss Moth’s mended I’ll give you a ride,” she offered Maddie; and Maddie, who is nothing if not calculating, asked if she could see the plane.

They had taken it to bits and carted it home from Highdown Rise, and now a team of boys and men in greasy overalls were working at putting it back together in one of a long line of high workshop sheds. The Puss Moth’s lovely engine (this is Maddie talking; she is a bit mad) had only **HALF THE POWER** of Maddie’s motorbike. They were cleaning the bits of turf out of it with wire brushes. It lay on a square of oilcloth in a thousand gleaming pieces. Maddie knew instantly she had come to the right place.

“Oh, can I watch?” she said. And Dymrna, who never got her hands dirty, could nevertheless name every cylinder and valve that was lying on the floor, and let Maddie have a go painting the new fabric (over the fuselage she’d kicked in) with a mess of plastic goo called “dope,” which smelled like pickled onions. After an hour had gone by and Maddie was still there asking what all the parts of the plane were for and what they were called, the mechanics gave her a wire brush and let her help.

Maddie said she always felt very safe, after that, flying in Dymrna’s Puss Moth, because she had helped to put its engine back together herself.

“When are you coming back?” Dymrna asked her over oily mugs of tea, four hours later.

“It’s too far for me to visit very often,” Maddie confessed sadly. “I live in Stockport. I help my granddad in his office in the week, and he pays for my petrol, but I can’t come here every weekend.”

“You are the luckiest girl alive,” Dympna said. “As soon as the Puss Moth’s flying again I’m moving both my planes to the new airfield at Oakway. It’s right by Ladderall Mill, where your friend Beryl works. There’s a big gala at Oakway next Saturday, for the airfield’s official opening. I’ll come and collect you, and you can watch the fun from the pilots’ stand. Beryl can come along too.”

That’s two airfields I’ve located for you.

I am getting a bit wobbly because no one has let me eat or drink since yesterday and I have been writing for nine hours. So now I am going to risk tossing this pencil across the table and have a good howl

This pen does nt work. Sorry ink blots. Is this test or punishment I want my pencil back

[Note to SS-Hauptsturmführer Amadeus von Linden, translated from the German]

The English Flight Officer is telling the truth. The ink given her was too old/too thick to use and clotted badly in the pen nib. It has now been thinned and I am testing it here to affirm that it is acceptable for writing.

Heil Hitler!

SS-Scharführer Etienne Thibaut

You ignorant Quisling *bastard*, SS-Scharführer Etienne Thibaut, I AM SCOTTISH.

The comedians Laurel and Hardy, I mean underling-Sergeant Thibaut and On-Duty-Female-Guard Engel, have been very jolly at my expense over the inferior ink Thibaut found for me to write with. He ruddy well had to thin it with *kerosene*, didn't he. He was annoyed when I made a fuss over the ink, and he didn't seem to believe me about the clogged pen, so I became *rather upset* when he went away and came back with a liter of kerosene. When he brought in the tin I knew straight away what it was, and Miss E. had to throw a jug of water in my face to stop my hysterics. Now she is sitting across the table from me lighting and relighting her cigarette and flicking the matches in my direction to make me jump, but she is laughing as she does it.

She was anxious last night because she didn't think I'd

coughed up enough facts to count as a proper little Judas yesterday. Again I think that she was worrying about von Linden's reaction, as she is the one who has to translate what I write for him. As it turned out, he said it was an "interesting overview of the situation in Britain over the long term" and a "curious individual perspective" (he was testing my German a bit while we talked about it). Also I think he hopes I will do some ratting on Monsieur Laurel and Mademoiselle Hardy. He does not trust Thibaut because Thibaut is French, and he does not trust Engel because Engel is a woman. I am to be given water throughout the day while I write (to drink, as well as to prevent hysterics) *and* a blanket. For a blanket in my cold little room, SS-Hauptsturmführer Amadeus von Linden, I would without remorse or hesitation rat on my heroic ancestor William Wallace, Guardian of Scotland.

I know your other prisoners despise me. Thibaut took me to... I don't know what you call it when you make me watch, is it *instruction*? To remind me how fortunate I am, perhaps? After my tantrum yesterday, when I had stopped writing and before I was allowed to eat, on the way back to my cell, Scharführer Thibaut made me stop and watch while Jacques was being questioned again. (I don't know what his real name is; *Jacques* is what the French citizens all call each other in *A Tale of Two Cities*, and it seems appropriate.) That boy *hates* me. It makes no difference that I, too, am strapped securely to my own chair with piano wire or something, and gasp with sobs on his account and look away the whole time except when Thibaut holds my head in place. Jacques knows, they all know, that I am the collaborator, the only coward among them. No one else has given out a single scrap of code—let alone ELEVEN SETS—not to mention a written confession. He spits at me as they drag him out.

"Little Scottish piece of shit."

It sounds so pretty in French, *p'tit morceau de merde écossaise*. Singlehandedly I have brought down the 700-year-strong Auld Alliance between France and Scotland.

There is another Jacques, a girl, who whistles "Scotland the Brave" if we are taken past each other (my prison is an antechamber to the suite they use for interrogations), or some

other battle hymn associated with my heritage, and she spits too. They all detest me. It is not the same as their hatred for Thibaut, the Quisling turncoat, who is their countryman and is working for the enemy. I am your enemy too, I should be one of them. But I am beyond contempt. A wee Scots piece o' shite.

Don't you think it makes them stronger when you give them someone to despise? They look at me sniveling in the corner and think, "*Mon Dieu*. Don't ever let me be like *her*."

THE CIVIL AIR GUARD (SOME FIGURES)

That heading looks terrifically official. I feel better already. Like a proper little Judas.

Suppose you were a girl in Stockport in 1938, raised by loving and indulgent grandparents, and rather obsessed with engines. Suppose you decided you wanted to learn to fly: really *fly*. You wanted to fly airplanes.

A three years' course with Air Service Training would have cost you over a thousand pounds. I don't know what Maddie's granddad would have earned in a year back then. He did fairly well with his motorbike business, as I have said; not so well during the Depression, but still, by our standards at that time, anyone would have considered his a good living. At any rate it would have cost him most of his year's earnings to buy Maddie one year of flying lessons. She got her first flight free, an hour's excursion in Dympna's restored Puss Moth on a glorious clear summer evening of crisp wind and long light, and saw the Pennines from above for the first time. Beryl got to come along for the ride, since she had been as much involved in Dympna's rescue as Maddie had, but Beryl had to sit in the very back and couldn't see so well and was sick into her handbag. She thanked Dympna but never went for another flight.

And of course, that was a joyride, not a lesson. Maddie couldn't afford lessons. But she made Oakway Aerodrome her own. Oakway came into being in parallel with Maddie's crush on airplanes—I want bigger toys, she'd wished, and hey presto, a week later, there was Oakway. It was only a fifteen-minute

motorbike ride from home. The aerodrome was so spanking new that the mechanics there were happy to have an extra pair of capable hands around. Maddie was out every Saturday that summer tinkering with engines and doping fabric wings and making friends. Then, in October, her persistence suddenly, unexpectedly paid off. That is when we started the Civil Air Guard.

I say *we*—I mean Britain. Just about every flying club in the kingdom joined in, and so many thousands of people applied—free flight training!—that they could only take about a tenth of them. And only one in twenty of those were women. But Maddie got lucky again, because all the engineers and mechanics and instructors at Oakway knew and liked her now, and she got glowing recommendations for being quick and committed and knowing all about oil levels. She wasn't immediately any better than any other pilot who trained at Oakway with the Civil Air Guard. But she wasn't any worse, either. She made her first solo flight in the first week of the new year, between snow flurries.

Look at the timing, though. Maddie started flying in late October 1938...Hitler (you will notice that I have thought better of my colorful descriptive terms for the Führer and carefully scratched them all out) invaded Poland on 1 September 1939 and Britain declared war on Germany two days later. Maddie flew the practical test for her "A" license, the basic pilot's license, six months before all civil aircraft were grounded in August. After that, most of those planes were taken into government service. Both of Dymyna's planes were requisitioned by the Air Ministry for communications, and she was mad as a cat about it.

Days before Britain declared war on Germany, Maddie flew by herself to the other side of England, skimming the tops of the Pennines and avoiding the barrage balloons like silver ramparts protecting the sky around Newcastle. She followed the coast north to Bamburgh and Holy Island. I know that stretch of the North Sea very well because the train from Edinburgh to London goes that way, and I was up and down all year when I was at school. Then when my school closed just before the war, instead of finishing elsewhere, I went to university a bit

suddenly for a term and took the train to get there too, feeling very grown-up.

The Northumbrian coast is the most beautiful length of the whole trip. The sun still sets quite late in the north of England in August, and Maddie on fabric wings flew low over the long sands of Holy Island and saw seals gathered there. She flew over the great castle crags of Lindisfarne and Bamburgh to the north and south, and over the ruins of the twelfth century priory, and over all the fields stretching yellow and green toward the low Cheviot Hills of Scotland. Maddie flew back following the 70-mile 2,000-year-old dragon's back of Hadrian's Wall, to Carlisle and then south through the Lakeland fells, along Lake Windermere. The soaring mountains rose around her, and the poets' waters glittered beneath her in the valleys of memory—hosts of golden daffodils, *Swallows and Amazons*, Peter Rabbit. She came home by way of Blackstone Edge above the old Roman road to avoid the smoke haze over Manchester, and landed back at Oakway, sobbing with anguish and love; love, for her island home that she'd seen whole and fragile from the air in the space of an afternoon, from coast to coast, holding its breath in a glass lens of summer and sunlight. All about to be swallowed in nights of flame and blackout. Maddie landed at Oakway before sunset and shut down the engine, then sat in the cockpit weeping.

More than anything else, I think, Maddie went to war on behalf of the Holy Island seals.

She climbed out of Dympna's Puss Moth at last. The late, low sun lit up the other airplanes in the hangar Dympna used, expensive toys about to realize their finest hour (in less than a year, that very same Puss Moth, flown by someone else, would ferry blood deliveries to the gasping British Expeditionary Force in France). Maddie ran all the checks she'd normally run after a flight, and then started again with the ones she'd run before a flight. Dympna found her there half an hour later, still not having put the plane to bed, cleaning midges off the windscreen in the late golden light.

"You don't need to do that."

"Someone does. I won't be flying it again, will I? Not after tomorrow. It's the only thing I *can* do, check the oil, clean the

bugs.”

Dympna stood smoking calmly in the evening sunlight and watched Maddie for a while. Then she said, “There’s going to be air work for girls in this war. You wait. They’re going to need all the pilots they can get fighting for the Royal Air Force. That’ll be young men, some of them with less training than you’ve got now, Maddie. And that’ll leave the old men, and the women, to deliver new aircraft and carry their messages and taxi their pilots. That’ll be us.”

“You think?”

“There’s a unit forming for civil pilots to help with the War Effort. The ATA—Air Transport Auxiliary—men and women both. It’ll happen any day. My name’s in the pool; Pauline Gower’s heading the women’s section.” Pauline was a flying friend of Dympna’s; Pauline had encouraged Dympna’s joyriding business. “You’ve not the qualifications for it, but I won’t forget you, Maddie. When they open up training to girls again I’ll send you a telegram. You’ll be the first.”

Maddie scrubbed at midges and scrubbed at her eyes, too, too miserable to answer.

“And when you’re done slaving, I’m going to make you a mug of best Oakway Pilot’s Oily Tea, and tomorrow morning I’m going to march you into the nearest WAAF recruitment office.”

WAAF is Women’s Auxiliary Air Force, auxiliary to the RAF, the Royal Air Force. You don’t *fly* in the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force, but the way things are now you can do almost any job a man does, all the work associated with flying and fighting: electrician, technician, fitter, barrage balloon operator, driver, cook, hairdresser....You would have thought our Maddie would go for a job in mechanics, wouldn’t you? So early in the war, they hadn’t yet opened up those jobs to women. It didn’t matter that Maddie had a good deal more experience than a lot of boys; there wasn’t a place for her. But she’d already learned Morse code and a bit about radio transmission as part of her training for her pilot’s “A” license. The Air Ministry was in a panic in August 1939, scrambling for women to do radio work as it dawned on them how many men they’d need to do the flying. Maddie joined the WAAF and

eventually became a radio operator.

SOME WAAF TRADES

It was like being at school. I don't know if Maddie thought so too; she didn't go to a Swiss boarding school, she was at a grammar school in Manchester and she certainly never thought about going to university. Even when she was at school she came home every day and never had to share a room with twenty girls, or sleep on a straw mattress made up of three bales like a set of settee cushions. We called them "biscuits." You were always so tired you didn't care; I would cut off my left hand to have one here. That fussy kit inspection they made you do, where you had to lay out all your worldly belongings in random but particular order on the folded blanket, like a jigsaw, and if anything was a millimeter the wrong way, you got points off your score—that was just like being in school. Also all the slang, the "square-bashing" drilling exercises, and the boring meals and the uniforms, though Maddie's group didn't get issued proper uniforms at first. They all wore matching blue cardigans, like Girl Guides (Guides don't wear Air Force blue cardigans, but you see what I mean).

Maddie was stationed at Oakway to begin with, very convenient to home. This was late 1939, early 1940. The Phoney War. Nothing much happening.

Not in Britain, anyway. We were biting our nails, practicing.

Waiting.

TELEPHONIST

"You! Girl in the blue cardigan!"

Five girls in headsets looked around from their switchboards, pointed to their chests, and mouthed silently, *Me?*

“Yes, you! Aircraftwoman Brodatt! What are you doing here? You’re a licensed radio operator!”

Maddie pointed to her headset and the front cord she was about to connect.

“Take the damned thing off and answer me.”

Maddie turned back to her switchboard and coolly plugged in the front cord. She toggled the appropriate keys and spoke clearly into the headset. “The Group Captain is through to you now, sir. You may go ahead.” She took off the headset and turned back to the troll who was waiting for a reply. It was the chief flight instructor for Oakway’s Royal Air Force squadron, the man who had given Maddie her flight test nearly a year ago.

“Sorry, sir. This is where I’ve been posted, sir.” (I did say it was like being at school.)

“Posted! You’re not even any of you in uniform!”

Five dutiful Aircraftwomen First Class straightened their Air Force blue cardigans.

“We’ve not been issued full dress, sir.”

“Posted!” the officer repeated. “You’ll start in the radio room tomorrow, Aircraftwoman Brodatt. The operator’s assistant is down with influenza.” And he lifted the headset from her console to perch it precariously over his own large head. “Put me through to the WAAF administration unit,” he said. “I want to talk to your section officer.”

Maddie flipped the keys and plugged in the cords, and he gave her posting orders over her own telephone.

RADIO OPERATOR

“Tyro to ground, tyro to ground,” came the call from the training aircraft. “Position uncertain, overhead triangular body of water to east of corridor.”

“Ground to tyro,” answered Maddie. “Is it a lake or a reservoir?”

“Say again?”

“Lake or reservoir? Your triangular body of water.”

After a short silence, Maddie prompted: “A reservoir has got a dam at one end.”

“Tyro to ground. Affirm reservoir.”

“Is it Ladyswell? Manchester barrage balloons at ten o’clock and Macclesfield at eight o’clock?”

“Tyro to ground, affirm. Position located. Overhead Ladyswell for return to Oakway.”

Maddie sighed. “Ground to tyro, call on final approach.”

“Wilco.”

Maddie shook her head, swearing unprettily under her breath. “Oh my sainted aunt! unlimited visibility! unlimited visibility except for the dirty great city in the northwest! That would be the dirty great city surrounded at 3000 feet by a few hundred silver hydrogen balloons as big as buses! How in the name of mud is he going to find *Berlin* if he can’t find *Manchester*?”

There was a bit of quiet in the radio room. Then the chief radio officer said gently, “Leading Aircraftwoman Brodatt, you’re still transmitting.”

“Brodatt, stop there.”

Maddie and everyone else had been told to go home. Or back to their various barracks and lodgings, anyway, for an afternoon’s rest. It was a day of such appallingly evil weather that the streetlamps would have been lit if it weren’t for fear of enemy aircraft seeing them, not that enemy aircraft can fly in such murk either. Maddie and the other WAAFs in her barracks still hadn’t got proper uniforms, but as it was winter, they had been issued RAF overcoats—men’s overcoats. Warm and waterproof, but ridiculous. Like wearing a tent. Maddie clutched hers tight in at the sides when the officer spoke to her, standing upright and hoping she looked smarter than she felt. She stopped so he could catch up with her, waiting on the duckboards laid over the concrete apron because there was so much standing water about that if you stepped in a puddle it came over the tops of your shoes.

"Was it you talked down my lads training in the Wellington bomber this morning?" the officer asked.

Maddie gulped. She had thrown radio protocol to the wind to guide those boys in, bullying them through a ten-minute gap in the low-lying cloud, praying they would follow her instructions without question, and that she wasn't directing them straight into the explosive-rigged steel cables that tethered the barrage balloons meant to deter enemy aircraft. Now she recognized the officer: it was one of the squadron leaders.

"Yes, sir," she admitted hoarsely, her chin held high. The air was so full of moisture it made her hair stick to her forehead. She waited miserably, expecting him to summon her to be court-martialed.

"Those boys jolly well owe you their lives," he said to Maddie. "Not one of them on instruments yet and flying without a map. We shouldn't have let them take off this morning."

"Thank you, sir," Maddie gasped.

"Singing your praises, those lads were. Made me wonder, though; have you any idea what the runway looks like from the air?"

Maddie smiled faintly. "I've a pilot's 'A' license. Still valid. Of course I haven't flown since August."

"Oh, I see!"

The RAF squadron leader set off to walk Maddie to the canteen at the airfield's perimeter. She had to trot a little to match his stride.

"Took your license here at Oakway, did you? Civil Air Guard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Instructor's rating?"

"No, sir. But I've flown at night."

"Now that's unusual! used the fog line, have you?"

He meant the fierce gas lamps that line the runway at intervals on either side so you can land in bad weather.

"Two or three times. Not often, sir."

"So you *have* seen the runway from the air. And in the dark, too! Well—"

Maddie waited. She really didn't have any idea what this man was going to say next.

"If you're going to talk people down, you'd damn well better know what the forward view from the cockpit of a Wellington bomber looks like in the landing configuration. Fancy a flight in a Wellington?"

"Oh, yes, please, sir!"

(You see—it was just like being in school.)

STOOGES

That is not a WAAF trade. That is what they call it when you go along in an aircraft just for the ride and don't meaningfully contribute to a successful flight. Perhaps Maddie was more of a backseat driver than a stooge.

—"Don't think you've reset the directional gyro."

—"He told you heading 270. You've turned east."

—"Look sharp, lads, northbound aircraft at three o'clock, one thousand feet below."

Once the electric undercarriage failed, and she had to earn her keep by taking her turn at the hand pump so they didn't have to crash land. Once they let her ride in the gun turret. She loved that, like being a goldfish alone in an empty sky.

Once they had to lift her out of the plane after landing because she was shaking so badly she couldn't climb down herself.

Maddie's Wellington joyrides were not exactly clandestine, but they weren't exactly cricket either. She was counted among the S.O.B.—Souls On Board—when the lads took off, but she certainly wasn't authorized to be there coaxing along the novice bombing crews as they practiced low flying over the high moors. So various off- and on-duty concerned people came pelting out of offices and the men's and ladies' tea huts, coatless and white-faced, when they saw Maddie's RAF mates chair-lifting her in their arms across the runway.

A WAAF friend of hers called Joan, and the guilty squadron leader, reached her first.

“What’s wrong? What happened? Is she hurt?”

Maddie was not hurt. She was already badgering the Wellington crew who carried her to put her down. “Get off, everyone will see, the girls will never let me forget it—”

“What happened?”

Maddie struggled to her feet and stood shivering on the concrete. “We got fired on,” she said, and looked away, burning with shame at how much it had taken out of her.

“Fired on!” barked the squadron leader. This was in the spring of 1940—the war was still in Europe. It was before the disastrous May when the Allies fled, retreating to the French beaches, before the siege that was the Battle of Britain, before the thunder and flame-filled nights of the Blitz. In the spring of 1940 our skies were alert and armed and uneasy. But they were still safe.

“Yes, *fired on*,” echoed the Wellington pilot in fury. He was white as a sheet too. “By those idiots manning the anti-aircraft guns at the Cattercup barrage balloons. By *our own gunners*. Who the hell’s training them? Bloody daft trigger-happy morons! Wasting ammo and scaring the blue bleeding daylights out of everybody! Any school lad can spot the difference between a flying cigar and a flying pencil!”

(We call our jolly Wellingtons “flying cigars,” and we call your nasty Dorniers “flying pencils.” Have fun translating, Miss E.)

The pilot had been as scared as Maddie, but he was not shaking.

Joan put a comforting arm around Maddie’s shoulders and advised her in a whisper to pay no attention to the pilot’s language. Maddie gave an uncertain and forced laugh.

“Wasn’t even sitting in the gun turret,” she muttered. “Thank goodness *I’m* not flying into Europe.”

SIGNALS BRANCH

“Flight Lieutenant Mottram has been singing your praises,” Maddie’s WAAF section officer told her. “He says you’ve got the sharpest pair of eyes at Oakway”—the section officer rolled her own eyes—“probably a bit of an exaggeration, but he said that in flight you’re always the first to spot another aircraft approaching. How do you fancy further training?”

“In what?”

The section officer coughed apologetically. “It’s a bit secret. Well: very secret. Say yes, and I’ll send you on the course.”

“Yes,” Maddie said.

To clarify a remark someone made earlier, I confess that I am making up all the proper nouns. Did you think I remembered all the names and ranks of everybody Maddie ever worked with? Or every plane she ever flew in? I think it is more interesting this way.

That is all I can usefully write today, though I would keep on blethering about nothing if I thought that by doing it I could avoid the next few hours’ cross-examination—Engel struggling over my handwriting and von Linden picking holes in everything I’ve said. It must be done... no point in putting it off. I have a blanket to look forward to afterward, I hope, perhaps a tepid dish of kailkenny à la guerre—that is, cabbage and potato mash without the potato and with not very much cabbage. I have not got scurvy yet, anyway, thanks to France’s infinite supply of prison cabbage. Heigh-ho—

RAF WAAF RDF Y
S.O.B. S.O.E.
Asst S/O Flt Off
w/op
clk/sd
m'aidez m'aidez mayday

COASTAL DEFENSE

Actually, I am afraid to write this.

I don't know why I think it matters. The Battle of Britain is over. Hitler's planned invasion, Operation Sea Lion, failed three years ago. And soon he will be fighting a desperate war on two fronts, with the Americans behind us and the Russians closing in on Berlin from the east, and organized resistance in all the countries in the middle. I can't believe his advisers don't already know what went on in the makeshift huts of iron and concrete up and down the southeast coast of England in the summer of 1940—in a general sense, at any rate.

Only, I don't really want to go down in history as the one who gave out the details.

RDF is Range and Direction Finding. Same acronym as Radio Direction Finding, to confuse the enemy, but not exactly the same thing. As you know. Well. They call it *Radar* now, an American word, an acronym of *R*Adio *D*etection And *R*anging, which I do not think is easier to remember. In the summer of 1940 it was still so new nobody knew what it was, and so secret that

Buckets of blood—I can't do this.

I have spent a vexing half hour scrapping with Fräulein Engel over the pen nib, which I swear I did not bend on purpose the first time. It is true that it spared me having to continue for a good long while, but it did not move things along for that harpy to straighten it out against my teeth when I could have easily done it myself against the table. It is also true that it was stupid of me to bend it out of shape again, on purpose, the second she handed it back to me. Then she had to show me SEVERAL TIMES how when she was at school the nurse would use a pen nib to make a pinprick for a blood test.

I don't know why I bent the stupid thing again. It is so easy to wind Miss Engel up. She always wins, but only because my ankles are tied to my chair.

Well, and also, because at the end of every argument she reminds me of the deal I made with a certain officer of the Gestapo, and I collapse.

“Hauptsturmführer von Linden is busy, as you know, and will not wish to be interrupted. But I have been told to summon him if necessary. You have been given pen and paper by his judgment of your willingness to cooperate with him, and if you will not write out the confession you have agreed, he will have no choice but to resume your interrogation.”

JUST SHUT UP, ANNA ENGEL. I KNOW.

I will do anything: she has only to mention his name and I remember now, I will do anything, *anything*, to avoid him interrogating me again.

So. Range and Direction Finding. Coastal Defense. Do I get my thirty pieces of silver? No, just some more of this hotel stationery. It is very nice to write on.

COASTAL DEFENSE, THE UNABRIDGED VERSION

We saw it coming—someone saw it coming. We were that little bit ahead of you, and you didn't realize it. You didn't realize how advanced the RDF system was already, or how quickly we were training people to use it, or how far we could see with it.

You didn't even realize how quickly we were building new planes of our own. It is true we were outnumbered, but with RDF we saw you coming—saw the swarms of Luftwaffe aircraft even as they were leaving their bases in Occupied France, worked out how high they were flying, saw how many of them were making the raid. And that gave us time to rally. We could meet you in the air, beat you back, keep you from landing, distract you till your fuel ran out and you turned tail until the next wave. Our besieged island, alone on the edge of Europe.

Maddie was sworn to secrecy on the life of her unborn children. It's so secret they don't give you a title when you have anything to do with Radar; you're just called a "special duties clerk." Clerk, Special Duties, clk/sd for short, like w/ op is for Wireless Operator and Y for wireless. Clk/sd, that's possibly the most useful and damning piece of information I've given you. Now you know.

Maddie spent six weeks in Radar training. She was also given a very nice promotion and made an officer. Then she was posted to RAF Maidsend, an operational base for a squadron of new Spitfire fighter planes, not far from Canterbury, near the Kentish coast. It was the farthest she had ever been from home. Maddie was not actually put to work at a Radar screen in one of the direction finding stations, though Maidsend did have one; she was still in the radio room. In the fire and fury of the summer of 1940, Maddie sat in a tower of iron and concrete taking bearings over the telephone. The other RDF girls did the ID work on the glass screens with the blinking green lights, and wired or telephoned it to Operations; when Operations identified approaching aircraft for her, Maddie answered air-to-ground radio calls as the aircraft came limping home. Or sometimes roaring home in triumph, or newly delivered from the maintenance depot at Swi

SWINLEY SWINLEY

At *Swinley*. Thibaut has made me finish writing the name. I am so ashamed of myself I want to be sick again.

Engel says impatiently not to bother about the name of the workshop. There have been repeated attempts to bomb it to bits and it's not really a secret. Engel is sure our Hauptsturmführer will be more interested in my sample description of the early

Radar network. She is cross with T. now for interrupting.

I hate them both. Hate them all.

I HATE THEM

COASTAL DEFENSE, DAMN IT.

Sniveling idiot.

So. So, on the RDF screen you'd see a green dot for an aircraft, one or two moving across the screen. It might be ours. You'd watch a battle building, the dots multiplying—more joining the first as the pulsing light swept the screen. They'd come together and some of them would go out, like the cinders of sparklers. And every green flash that disappeared was a life finished, one man for a fighter, a whole crew for a bomber. *Out, out, brief candle.* (That is from *Macbeth*. He is said to be another of my unlikely ancestors, and actually did hold court on my family's estate from time to time. He was not, by all contemporary Scottish accounts, the treacherous bastard Shakespeare makes him out to be. Will history remember me for my MBE, my British Empire honor for "chivalry," or for my cooperation with the Gestapo? I don't want to think about it. I expect they can take the MBE away if you stop being chivalrous.)

If they were radio equipped, Maddie could talk to the planes the special duties clerks saw on their screens. She'd tell the pilots more or less what she'd have told them back at Oakway, except she didn't know landmarks so well in Kent. She'd pass bearings to the moving aircraft, along with wind speed and whether or not there were holes in the runway today (sometimes we got raided). Or she'd tell other planes to give priority to the one that had lost its flaps, or whose pilot had a lump of shrapnel lodged in his shoulder, or something like that.

Maddie was listening for incoming stragglers one afternoon following a battle that hadn't involved the Maidens Squadron. She nearly fell off her chair when she heard the desperate call that came in on her frequency.

“Mayday—mayday—”

Recognizable in English. Or perhaps that was French, “*M’aidez*,” help me. The rest of the transmission was in German.

The voice was a boy’s voice, young and scared. He broke off each call with a sob. Maddie swallowed—she had no idea where the anguished cries for help were coming from. Maddie called out, “Listen—listen!” and switched her headset onto the Tannoy speaker so that everyone could hear, and then she grabbed the telephone.

“It’s Assistant Section Officer Brodatt in the Tower. Can I get directly through to Jenny in Special Duties? All right, Tessa, then. Anyone with a screen going. I need an ident on a radio call—”

Everyone crowded around the telephone, reading over Maddie’s shoulder as she took notes from the direction finding station, then gasping aloud as the meaning of her notes sank in.

“Heading straight for Maidsend!”

“What if it’s a bomber?”

“*What if it’s still loaded?*”

“What if it’s a hoax?”

“He’d be calling in English if it was a hoax!”

“Anyone speak German?” shouted the officer in charge of the radio room. Silence.

“Christ! Brodatt, stay on the phone. Davenport, you run to the wireless station; perhaps one of those girls can help. Get me a German speaker! *Now!*”

Maddie listened with her heart in her mouth, holding her headset to one ear and the telephone to the other, waiting for the girl at the RDF screen to pass her new information.

“Shhh,” warned the radio officer, leaning over Maddie’s shoulder and taking hold of the telephone receiver for her so her right hand was freed up for taking notes. “Don’t say anything—don’t let him know who’s listening—”

The door to the radio room banged open, and the subordinate Davenport was back, with one of the WAAF wireless operators hard on his heels. Maddie looked up.

The girl was immaculate—not a blue thread out of place,

her chignon of long fair hair coiled in regulation neatness two inches above her uniform collar. Maddie recognized her from the canteen and rare social evenings. Queenie, people called her, though she was not the official WAAF Queen Bee (that's what we call the senior administrative officer on the base), nor was it her name. Maddie did not know her real name. Queenie had acquired a certain reputation for being fast and fearless; she sauced superior officers and got away with it, but equally she wouldn't leave a building during an air raid until she'd made sure everyone else was out. Distantly connected to royalty, she was of some rank herself, of privilege rather than experience, a flight officer; but she was said to work as diligently at her wireless set as any self-made shop girl. She was pretty, petite, and light on her feet, and if there was a Squadron dance on a Saturday night, she was the one the pilots went for.

"Let's have your headset, Brodatt," said the radio officer. Maddie uncurled the gripping earphones and microphone and passed her headset to the pretty little blond wireless operator, who adjusted the phones to fit her head.

After a few seconds Queenie said, "He says he's over the English Channel. He's looking for Calais."

"But Tessa says he's approaching the coast at Whitstable!"

"He's in a Heinkel bomber and his crew's been killed and he's lost an engine and he wants to land at Calais."

They all stared at the wireless operator.

"You sure we're all talking about the same aircraft?" the radio officer asked dubiously.

"Tessa," Maddie said into the telephone, "could the German plane be over the Channel?"

Now the whole room held its breath, waiting for Tessa's disembodied reply as, somewhere underneath the chalk cliffs, she sat staring at the green flashes on her screen. Her answer appeared beneath Maddie's scribbling pencil: *Hostile ident, track 187 Maidens 25 miles, est height 8,500 ft.*

"Why the hell does he think he's over the English Channel?"

"Oh!" Maddie gave a sudden gasp of understanding and waved at the enormous map of southeast England and

northwest France and the Low Countries that covered the wall behind her radio. “Look, look—he’s come from Suffolk. He’s been bombing the coastal bases there. He crossed the mouth of the Thames at its widest point and he thinks he crossed the *Channel*! He’s heading straight for Kent and he thinks it’s France!”

The chief radio officer gave the wireless operator a command.

“Answer him.”

“You’ll have to tell me the protocol, sir.”

“Brodatt, give her the correct protocol.”

Maddie swallowed. There wasn’t really any time to hesitate. She said, “What did he say he’s flying? What kind of aircraft? His bomber?”

The wireless operator said the name in German first, and they all looked at her blankly. “He-111?” she translated hesitantly.

“Heinkel He-111—Any other ID?”

“A Heinkel He-111. He didn’t say.”

“Just repeat back to him the type of his aircraft, Heinkel He-111. That’s an open reply. You press this button before you talk; keep it pressed while you’re talking or he won’t be able to hear you. Then let go when you’re done or he won’t be able to reply.”

The chief radio officer clarified, “‘Heinkel He-111, this is Calais-Marck.’ Tell him we are Calais-Marck.”

Maddie listened as the wireless operator made her first radio call, in German, as cool and crisp as if she’d been giving radio instructions to Luftwaffe bombers all her life. The Luftwaffe boy’s voice responded in a gasp of gratitude, practically weeping with relief.

The wireless operator turned to Maddie.

“He wants bearings for landing.”

“Tell him this—” Maddie scribbled numbers and distances on her notepad. “Say his ID first, then yours. ‘Heinkel He-111, this is Calais.’ Then runway, wind speed, visibility—” She scratched notes furiously. The wireless operator stared at the

coded abbreviations, then spoke into the headset, giving orders in German with confident calm.

She paused mid-flow and jabbed a perfectly manicured fingernail into the script Maddie had passed to her. She mouthed silently, *R27?*

“Runway twenty-seven,” Maddie said under her breath. “Say ‘Cleared straight in, Runway 27.’ Tell him to dump his leftover bombs in the sea if he’s got any, so he doesn’t set them off when he lands.”

The whole of the radio room was silent, mesmerized by the sharp, precisely spoken, and incomprehensible instructions that the elegant wireless operator rapped out with the careless authority of a headmistress; and the anguished, equally incomprehensible, gasped answers of the boy in the ruined plane; and Maddie scribbling directions, and the protocol for giving them, on the diminishing notepad.

“Here she comes!” breathed the chief radio officer, and everybody excepting Maddie and the wireless operator—whose heads were tied to the telephone and the radio headset—went running to the long window to watch the Heinkel bomber limping into view.

“When he calls final approach, just pass him the wind speed,” Maddie instructed, scribbling furiously. “Eight knots west-south-west, gusting to twelve.”

“Tell him the fire service is on its way to meet him,” said the radio officer. He clapped one of the other radio operators on the shoulder. “Get the engines out there. And an ambulance.”

The black silhouette in the distance grew larger. Then they could hear it coughing and whining on its single belabored engine.

“Christ! He hasn’t got the undercarriage down,” gasped the young flying officer called Davenport. “This is going to be one hell of a prang.”

But it wasn’t. The Heinkel pancaked in neatly on its belly in a shower of grass and turf, and came to rest right in front of the control tower, with the fire engines and pumps and an ambulance screaming up to meet it.

Everyone at the window went pelting down the stairs and

out to the runway.

Maddie put her headset back on. The two other radio operators were on their feet at the window. Maddie strained to hear what was going on and heard only sirens. Away from the window she could see sky and the windsock at the end of the runway, but not anything immediately below her. A thin thread of curling black smoke drifted up past the window.

Outside at the edge of the runway, Queenie, or whatever her name was, stood staring at the wreck of the Luftwaffe bomber.

Floundering on its belly, it was like a vast metallic whale spouting smoke instead of seawater. The wireless operator could see, through the shattered Plexiglas of the cockpit, the young pilot desperately trying to free his dead navigator from a torn and bloody helmet. She watched as a swarm of fitters and the fire service team closed in to lift the pilot and his lifeless crew out of the plane. And she saw the frank relief on the pilot's face turn to bewilderment and apprehension as he was increasingly surrounded by blue uniforms and the stripes and badges of the Royal Air Force.

The chief radio officer at her shoulder tut-tutted under his breath.

"Poor young Jerry bastard," he intoned. "He won't go home a hero, will he! Must have no sense of direction whatsoever."

He put a kind hand lightly on the German-speaking wireless operator's shoulder.

"If you don't mind," he said apologetically, "we could use your help questioning him."

Maddie was going off duty by the time the ambulance men had finished hurriedly patching up the German pilot and brought him into the ground floor office of the control tower. She caught a glimpse of the dazed young man sipping gingerly at a steaming mug while an orderly lit a cigarette for him. They had wrapped him in a blanket, and it was August, but his teeth were still chattering. The pretty blond wireless operator was perched on the edge of a hard chair at the other side of the room, politely looking away from this shattered and grief-stricken

enemy. She was smoking a cigarette of her own as she waited to be given further instruction. She looked just as poised and calm as she had been when she took the headset from Maddie in the radio room, but Maddie could see her casually drilling the back of her chair with one restless, manicured forefinger.

I couldn't have done what she just did, Maddie thought. We'd not have made this catch without her. Never mind speaking German; I couldn't have *faked* it like that, just off the top of my head, no training or anything. Not sure I could manage what she's going to have to do next, either. Thank goodness *I* don't speak German.

That night Maidsend was raided again. It wasn't anything to do with the captured Heinkel bomber; it was just an ordinary air raid, the Luftwaffe doing their worst to try to destroy British defenses. The RAF officers' quarters were blown up (no officers in it at the time), and great big holes gouged out of the runways. The WAAF officers were quartered in the gatehouse lodge at the edge of the estate grounds that the airfield had been built on, and Maddie and her bunk mates were so dead asleep they didn't hear the sirens. They only woke up after the first explosion. They ran through scrub woodland to the nearest shelter in their pajamas and tin hats, clutching gas masks and ID cards. There was no light to see by except the gunfire and the exploding flames—no streetlamps, no cracks of light in any doors or windows, not even the glow of a cigarette end. It was like being in hell, nothing but shadows and jumping flames and fire and stars overhead.

Maddie had grabbed an umbrella. Gas mask, tin hat, ration coupons, and an umbrella. Hellfire raining down on her out of the sky and she held it off with a brolly. No one realized she had it, of course, until she was struggling to get it in the door of the air raid shelter.

"Shut it—shut the damned thing—*leave it!*"

"I'm not leaving it!" Maddie cried, and managed to wrestle the umbrella inside. The girl behind her pushed, and one of the girls ahead of her grabbed her by the arm and pulled, and then they were all trembling in the dark underground with the door

shut.

A couple of them had had the sense to grab their cigarettes. They passed them 'round, parsimoniously sharing. There was not a single lad about—the men were quartered half a mile away on the other side of the airfield and used a different shelter—those that weren't scrambling into aircraft to fight back. The girl with the matches found a candle, and they all settled down for the duration.

"Bring us that deck of cards, love, let's have a round of rummy."

"Rummy! Don't be soft. Poker. We'll play for ciggies. For gosh sakes, put that brolly down, Brodatt, are you completely bonkers?"

"No," Maddie said very calmly.

They were all crouched on the dirt floor around the playing cards and glowing tobacco ends. It was cozy in perhaps the way you'd be cozy in hell. Something flying low was peppering the runway with machine gun fire; even buried mostly underground, even a quarter of a mile away, the shelter's iron walls shuddered.

"Glad I'm not on shift right now!"

"Pity the poor souls who are."

"Can I share your umbrella?"

Maddie looked up. Crouched next to her, in the light of the flickering candle and one oil lamp, was the small German-speaking wireless operator. She was a vision of feminine perfection and heroism even in her WAAF regulation-issue men's pajamas, her fair hair tumbling in a loose plait over one shoulder. Everybody else was shedding hairpins; Queenie's hairpins marched in ordered rank on her pajama pocket and would not go back in her hair till she was back in bed. With her slender manicured fingers she offered Maddie her cigarette.

"Wish I'd brought a brolly," she drawled in the plummy, educated tones of the Oxbridge colleges. "Super idea! A portable illusion of shelter and safety. Have you room for two?"

Maddie took the cigarette but did not immediately move over. The fey Queenie, Maddie knew, was given to fits of madness such as stealing malt whisky from the RAF officers'

mess, and Maddie was sure that anyone bold enough to impersonate an enemy radio operator on the spur of the moment was entirely capable of mocking someone who burst into tears every time she heard a gun fired. On a military airfield. In a war.

But Queenie didn't seem to be making fun of Maddie—quite the opposite. Maddie budged over a little and made room for another body beneath the umbrella.

“Marvelous!” Queenie cried out happily. “Like being a tortoise. They ought to make these out of steel. Let me hold it up—”

She gently pried the handle out of Maddie's trembling hand and held the ridiculous umbrella up over both their heads inside the bunker. Maddie took a drag on the offered cigarette. After a while of alternately biting her nails and smoking the borrowed cigarette down to a sliver of paper and ash, her hands stopped trembling. Maddie said hoarsely, “Thank you.”

“Not a problem,” said Queenie. “Why don't you play this round? I'll cover you.”

“What were you on Civvie Street, then—” Maddie asked casually. “An actress?”

The little wireless operator dissolved in a fit of gleeful laughter, but still steadfastly held up the umbrella over Maddie's head. “No, I just like pretending,” she said. “I do the same thing with our own boys, you know. Flirting's a game. I'm very boring, really. I'd be at university if it weren't for the war. I've not quite finished my first year. I started a year early and a term late.”

“Reading what?”

“German. Obviously. They spoke it—well, an odd variant—in the village where I went to school in Switzerland. And I liked it.”

Maddie laughed. “You were wizard this afternoon. Really brilliant.”

“I couldn't have done it without you telling me what to say. *You* were brilliant too. You were *right there* when I needed you, not a word or call out of place. You made all the decisions. All I had to do was pay attention, and that's what I do all day on the

Y sets anyway—Y, wireless, you know—just listen and listen. I never have to *do* anything. And all I had to do this afternoon was read from the script you gave me.”

“You had to translate!” Maddie said.

“We did it together,” said her friend.

People are complicated. There is so much more to everybody than you realize. You see someone in school every day, or at work, in the canteen, and you share a cigarette or a coffee with them, and you talk about the weather or last night’s air raid. But you don’t talk so much about what was the nastiest thing you ever said to your mother, or how you pretended to be David Balfour, the hero of *Kidnapped*, for the whole of the year when you were thirteen, or what you imagine yourself doing with the pilot who looks like Leslie Howard if you were alone in his bunk after a dance.

No one slept the night of that air raid, or the next day. We pretty much had to resurface the runway ourselves that morning. We weren’t equipped for it, we didn’t have the tools or the materials, and we weren’t a building crew, but without a runway, RAF Maidsend was defenseless. And Britain too, in the bigger picture. We repaired the runway.

Everyone mucked in, including the captured German—I think he was rather apprehensive about his fate as a prisoner of war and was just as happy to spend the day stripped to the waist shoveling piles of earth with twenty other pilots than to be moved on to some unknown official internment awaiting him inland. I remember we all had to bow our heads in a moment of silence for his dead companions before we set to work. I don’t know what happened to him after that.

In the canteen, Queenie was asleep with her head on the table. She must have done up her hair first, before she came in from two hours’ stone-picking on the runway, but she’d fallen asleep before she’d even taken the spoon out of her tea.

Maddie sat down across from her with two fresh cups of tea and one iced bun. I don’t know where the icing came from. Someone must have been hoarding sugar just in case there was a direct hit on the airfield and everybody needed cheering up.

Maddie was quite relieved to see the unflappable wireless operator with her guard down. She pushed the Cup That Cheers close to Queenie's face so that the warmth woke her.

They propped their heads on their elbows, facing each other.

"Are you scared of *anything*?" Maddie asked.

"Lots of things!"

"Name one."

"I can name ten."

"Go on, then."

Queenie looked at her hands. "Breaking my nails," she said critically. After two hours' clearing the runway of rubble and twisted metal, her manicure was in need of repair.

"I'm serious," said Maddie quietly.

"All right, then. Dark."

"I don't believe you."

"It's true," said Queenie. "Now your turn."

"Cold," Maddie answered.

Queenie sipped her tea. "Falling asleep while I'm working."

"Me too." Maddie laughed. "And bombs dropping."

"Too easy."

"All right." It was Maddie's turn to be defensive. She shook tangled dark curls off her collar; her hair was barely short enough to count as regulation, and too short to put up. "Bombs dropping on my gran and granddad."

Queenie nodded in agreement. "Bombs dropping on my favorite brother. Jamie's the youngest of 'em, the nearest me in age. He's a pilot."

"Not having a useful skill," said Maddie. "I don't want to have to marry right away just so I don't have to work down Ladderal Mill."

"You are joking!"

"When the war's over I *still* won't have a skill. Bet there won't be this desperate need for radio operators when the war ends."

"You think that'll happen soon?"

"The longer the war goes on," Maddie said, carefully cutting her iced bun in half with a tin butter knife, "the older I'll get."

Queenie let out a giddy, tickled laugh. "Getting old!" she cried. "I'm horribly afraid of being old."

Maddie smiled and handed her half the bun. "Me too. Bit like being afraid of dying, though. Not much you can do about it."

"What am I up to?"

"You've done four. Not counting the nails. Six to go."

"All right." Queenie deliberately tore her bun into six equal pieces and arranged them around the rim of her saucer. Then, one by one, she dunked each piece into her tea, named a fear, and ate it.

"Number five, the Newbery College porter. Blimey, he's a troll. I was a year younger than all the other first years and I'd have been scared of him even if he hadn't hated me. It was because I was reading German and he was sure my tutor was a spy! Five down, right? Number six, heights, I'm afraid of heights. That's because my big brothers tied me to a drain spout on the roof of our castle when I was five and forgot about me all afternoon. All five of them got a good birching for it, too. Seven, ghosts—I mean one ghost, not seven, one particular ghost. I don't need to worry about that here. The ghost is probably why I'm scared of the dark too."

Queenie washed back these unlikely confessions with more tea. Maddie stared at her in growing amazement. They were still eye to eye across from each other with their chins against their hands and their elbows on the table, and Queenie did not seem to be making it up. She was taking her unlikely inventory very seriously.

"Number eight, getting caught stealing grapes from the glasshouse in the kitchen garden. That's another birching. 'Course we're all too old now for birchings *and* for grape-stealing. Number nine, killing someone. By accident or on purpose. Did I save that German laddie's life yesterday, or destroy it? You do it too—you tell the fighters where to find them. You're responsible. Do you think about it?"

Maddie didn't answer. She did think about it.

"Perhaps it gets easier after the first time. Number ten, getting lost."

Queenie glanced up from dipping "getting lost" in her tea and looked Maddie in the eye. "Now, I can see that you are skeptical and disinclined to believe anything I tell you. And perhaps I'm not *really* worried about ghosts. But I *am* afraid of getting lost. I *hate* trying to find my way around this airfield. Every Nissen hut looks the same. My God, there are forty of them! And all the taxiways and aprons seem to change every day. I keep trying to use planes for landmarks and they keep moving them around."

Maddie laughed. "I felt sorry for that lost Jerry pilot yesterday," she said. "I know I shouldn't. But I've seen so many of our own lads get confused, their first flight over the Pennines. Seems it shouldn't be possible to confuse England and France. But who knows what you're thinking when all your mates have been blown to smithereens and you're flying a broken plane. Perhaps it was his first flight to England. I felt dead sorry for him."

"Yes, I did too," said Queenie softly, and swallowed the last of her tea as if she were throwing back a dram of whisky.

"Was it beastly awful, questioning him?"

Queenie gave her an enigmatic little squint. "'Careless talk costs lives.' I've taken an oath not to tell about it."

"Oh!" Maddie went red. "Of course not. Sorry."

The wireless operator sat up straight. She looked at her ruined nails, shrugged, and patted her hair to make sure it was still in place. Then she stood up and stretched and yawned. "Thanks for sharing your bun," she said, smiling.

"Thanks for sharing your fears!"

"You still owe me a few."

The air raid siren went off.

NOT PART OF THE STORY

I must record last night's debriefing because it was so funny.

Engel flapped down my sheaf of scribbled-on hotel stationery in frustration and said to von Linden, "She must be commanded to write of the meeting between Brodatt and herself. This description of early Radar operations is irrelevant nonsense."

Von Linden made a sound like a very soft puff of air, like blowing out a candle. Engel and I both stared at him as though he'd suddenly sprouted horns. (It was a laugh. He didn't crack a smile—I think his face is made of plaster of paris—but he definitely laughed.)

"Fräulein Engel, you are not a student of literature," he said. "The English flight officer has studied the craft of the novel. She is making use of suspense and foreshadowing."

Golly, Engel stared at him. I, of course, took the opportunity to interpose with pigheaded Wallace pride, "I am not *English*, you ignorant Jerry bastard, I am a SCOT."

Engel dutifully slapped me into silence and said, "She is not writing a novel. She is making a report."

"But she is employing the literary conceits and techniques of a novel. And the meeting you speak of has already occurred—you have been reading it for the past quarter of an hour."

Engel shuffled pages in a frenzy, hunting backward.

"Do you not recognize her in these pages?" von Linden prompted. "Ah, perhaps not; she flatters herself with competence and bravery that you have never witnessed. She is the young woman called Queenie, the wireless operator who takes down the Luftwaffe aircraft. Our captive English agent—"

"Scottish!"

Slap.

“Our *prisoner* has not yet elaborated on her own role as a wireless operator at the aerodrome at Maidsend.”

Oh, he’s good. I would never in a million years have guessed that SS-Hauptsturmführer Amadeus von Linden is a “student of literature.” Not in a million years.

He wanted to know, then, why I was choosing to write about myself in the third person. Do you know, I had not even noticed I was doing it until he asked.

The simple answer is because I am telling the story from Maddie’s point of view, and it would be awkward to introduce another viewpoint character at this point. It is much easier writing about me in the third person than it would be if I tried to tell the story from my own point of view. I can avoid all my old thoughts and feelings. It’s a superficial way to write about myself. I don’t have to take myself seriously—or, well, only as seriously as Maddie takes me.

But, as von Linden pointed out, I have not even used my own name, which is what confused Engel.

I suppose the real answer is that I am not Queenie anymore. I just want to *thump my old self in the face* when I think about her, so earnest and self-righteous and flamboyantly heroic. I am sure other people did too.

I am someone else now.

They *did* used to call me Queenie, though. Everybody had stupid nicknames made up for them (like being at school, remember?). I was Scottie, sometimes, but more often Queenie. That was because Mary, Queen of Scots, is another of my illustrious ancestors. She died messily as well. They all died messily.

I am going to run out of stationery today. They have given me a Jewish prescription pad to use until they find something more sensible. I did not know such things existed. The forms have got the doctor’s name, Benjamin zylberberg, at the top, and a yellow star with a warning stamped at the bottom, stating that this Jewish doctor can only legally prescribe medication to other Jews. Presumably he is no longer practicing (presumably he has been shipped off to break rocks in a concentration camp

somewhere), which is why his blank prescriptions have fallen into the hands of the Gestapo.

PRESCRIPTION FORMS!

<i>Nom:</i> Anna Engel <i>Adresse:</i> Fräulein Engel is the required form. I sometimes use "On Duty Female Guard Mein Führer SIR" to wind her up.	<i>Date:</i> Not believed ever to have dated. Does she have a sweetheart? Husband? ... She wears no jewelry. (v.L. has a gold signet with a tiny sapphire in it.)
R_x Needs a damned good shagging. She may choose among the following: - Maquis guerrilla - Gestapo - Résistance - German army - French Milice police - Civilian	
<i>Médecin</i> Dr Sigmund Freud (Not Dr. Zylberberg but still appropriately Jewish)	<i>Rép.</i> Nightly, 4 or 5 fois

I've done her a nicer one, as well.

Nom: Anna Engel Adresse:	Date: Still looking
R_x ✓ 1 cigarette in ivory holder ✓ 1 magnum champagne (one normal bottle would not be enough to loosen her up) ✓ Chanel cocktail dress ... RED is Engel's color ✓ A table at the Hôtel Ritz Paris, if the Nazis ever clear out of it. Why are they so fond of ruining perfectly nice hotels?	
Médecin	Rép. As needed fois

I meant to give her a Night Out, but when I picture this scenario it makes me think of Mata Hari on a mission. Would Engel be happier as a spy, glamorous and deadly? I just can't imagine her in any role other than Beastly Punctilious Official. Also I can't say that the bleak aftermath of a special agent's *unsuccessful* mission has anything to recommend it.

I was going to do prescriptions for William Wallace and Mary, Queen of Scots, and Adolf Hitler, too, but I can't think of anything clever enough to make it worth the reprisals for the waste of paper.

Coffee would be at the top of my own prescription list. Then aspirin. I am running a fever. It won't be tetanus, as they inoculated us, but may be septicemia; I don't think those pins were very clean. There was one I missed for a while after I pulled the others out, and the spot is very sore now (I am a little worried about some of the burns, too, which chafe when my wrist hits the table as I write). Perhaps I will die quietly of blood poisoning and avoid the kerosene treatment.

There's no efficient way to kill yourself with a dressmaker's pin (I wouldn't call contracting gangrene an efficient way to kill yourself)—I puzzled over it for a long time, seeing as they'd left the pins there, but it's just not possible. Useful for picking locks, though. I so loved the burglary lessons we got when we were training. Didn't so much enjoy the bleak aftermath of my unsuccessful attempt to put them to use—very good at picking locks but not so good at getting out of the building. Our prison cells are only hotel bedrooms, but we are guarded like royalty. And also, there are dogs. After that episode with the pins, they had a good go at making sure I wouldn't be able to walk if I did manage to get out—don't know where you pick up the skills for disabling a person without actually breaking her legs, Nazi School of Assault and Battery? Like everything else, it wasn't permanent damage, nothing left this week but the bruises, and they check me carefully now for stray bits of metal. I got caught yesterday trying to hide a pen nib in my hair (I didn't have a plan for it, but you never know).

Oh—often I forget I am not writing this for myself, and then it's too late to scratch it out. The evil Engel always snatches everything away from me and raises an alarm if she

sees me trying to retract anything. Yesterday I tried ripping off the bottom of the page and eating it, but she got to it first. (It was when I realized I had thoughtlessly mentioned the factory at Swinley. It is refreshing sometimes to fight with her. She has the advantage of freedom, but I am a lot more imaginative. Also, I am willing to use my teeth, which she is squeamish about.)

Where was I? Hauptsturmführer von Linden has taken away everything I wrote yesterday. It is your own fault, you cold and soulless Jerry bastard, if I repeat myself.

Miss Engel has reminded me. "The air raid siren went." Clever girl, she has been paying attention.

She makes me give her every page to read now as soon as I have finished with it. We had fun doing the prescriptions. Will it get her in trouble if I mention that she burned a few *herself* to get rid of them this time? That'll teach you to try to make a chum of me, On-Duty-Female-Guard Engel.

I have already got her in trouble, without knowing I was doing it, by mentioning her cigarettes. She is not allowed to smoke while she is on duty. Apparently Adolf Hitler has a vendetta against tobacco, finds it filthy and disgusting, and his military police and their assistants are not meant to smoke at work. I don't think this is too strictly enforced except when the place is run by an obsessive martinet like Amadeus von Linden. Shame for him, really, as a lit cigarette is such a convenient accessory if your job happens to be Extracting Information from Enemy Intelligence Agents.

As long as Engel's crimes are all so minor, they won't get rid of her because her combined talents would be quite difficult to replace (a bit like mine). But her offenses do consistently fall under "insubordination."

ANTIAIRCRAFT GUNNER

The air raid siren went. Every head in the room looked up in dismay and exhaustion at the canteen's pasteboard ceiling, as if they could see through it. Then everybody rocketed from their

borrowed church hall wooden folding chairs to meet the next battle.

Maddie stood facing her new friend by the table they had just abandoned, people around her whirling into action. She felt as though she were at the eye of a tropical storm. The still point of the turning world.

“Come on!” Queenie cried, just like the Red Queen in *Through the Looking Glass*, and grabbed Maddie by the arm to pull her outside. “You go on duty at one; what have you got”—she glanced at her watch—“an hour? A quick nap in the shelter before they need you in the radio room—pity you haven’t brought your broly along. Come on, I’ll go with you.”

The pilots were already racing for the Spitfires, and Maddie tried to fix her mind on the practical problem of how best to take off from the half-mended runway—taxiing would be the hardest, as you wouldn’t be able to see the holes in the surface past the high nose of the little fighter planes. She tried not to think about what it would be like running across the airfield to the radio room an hour from now, under fire.

But she did it. Because you do. It is incredible what you do, knowing you have to. A bit less than an hour later—to allow themselves some extra time for dodging bombs—the two girls were outside again, in the moonscape that was now RAF Maidsend.

Queenie steered Maddie at a trot, both of them bent nearly double, hugging the sides of buildings and zigzagging across the open spaces. They’d heard how during the retreat from France the low-flying planes of the Luftwaffe would strafe people on the ground with machine gun fire, just for the hell of it, and right now there were two or three German fighters buzzing low over the runway like wasps with the sun on their wings, drilling holes in windows and parked aircraft.

“Over here! Here!” someone yelled desperately. “Hey, you two, come help here!”

For a few seconds, Maddie, doggedly coping with her own private hell of rational or irrational fear, did not even notice Queenie’s change of direction as she headed toward the cry for help. Then sense came back to Maddie for a minute and she

realized that Queenie was dragging her to the nearest antiaircraft gun emplacement.

Or what was left of it. Most of the protective concrete barrier and the sandbags surrounding it had been blown to bits, taking with it two of the army gunners who had been valiantly trying to keep the runway fit for the Spitfire squadron that would have to land there after the battle. One of the dead gunners was easily younger than Maddie. A third man who was still standing looked like a butcher without the apron, soaked from neck to thighs in blood. He turned wearily and said, "Thanks for the relief. I'm beat." Then he sat down on the ruined platform and closed his eyes. Maddie cowered next to him, her arms over her head, listening to the hideous rattle of the gunner sucking air into blood-filled lungs. Queenie slapped her.

"Get up, girl!" she ordered. "I won't have this. I'm your superior officer giving orders now. Get up, Brodatt. If you're scared, *do something*. See if you can make this gun work. Get moving!"

"The shell needs to be loaded first," the gunner whispered, lifting a finger to point. "The Prime Minister don't like girls firing guns."

"Bother the Prime Minister!" exclaimed the superior officer. "Load the damned gun, Brodatt."

Maddie, nothing if not mechanically minded and trained to react positively to orders from people in authority, clawed her way up the gun.

"That slip of a lass'll never shift that shell," croaked the gunner. "Weighs thirty pounds, that does."

Maddie wasn't listening. She was reckoning. After a minute's rational thought, and with strength that she later couldn't explain, she loaded the shell.

Queenie worked frantically over the fallen gunner, trying to plug the holes in his chest and stomach. Maddie did not watch. After some time, Queenie took her by the shoulders and showed her how to aim.

"You've got to anticipate—it's like shooting birds, you have to fire a little ahead of where they'll be next—"

“Shoot a lot of birds, do you?” Maddie gasped, anger and fear making her peevish about the other girl’s seemingly limitless talents.

“I was born in the middle of a grouse moor on the opening day of the shooting season! I could fire a gun before I could read! But this poxy thing is just a wee bit bigger than a Diana air rifle, and I don’t know how it works, so we have to do it together. Like yesterday, all right?” She gave a sudden gasp and asked anxiously, “That’s not one of our planes, is it?”

“Can’t you tell?”

“Not really.”

Maddie relented.

“It’s a Messerschmitt 109.”

“Well, clobber it! Point this way—now wait till he comes back, he doesn’t know this station’s still operational—just wait.”

Maddie waited. Queenie was right: doing something, focusing, took away the fear.

“Now go!”

The blast momentarily blinded them both. They did not see what happened. Maddie swore, afterward, that the plane did not go down in a ball of flame until it had made at least two more passes over the runway. But no one else ever claimed to have shot down that Me 109 (oh, how many aircraft I know after all!), and God knows the fighter pilots were a competitive lot of bean counters. So that kill (I expect the Luftwaffe also call it a kill when someone shoots down a plane, like deer) was credited to two off-duty WAAF officers working together at an unmanned gun station.

“I don’t think our gun did that,” Maddie told her friend, whey-faced, as the black, oily smoke rose from the turnip field where the plane had come down. “It must have been one of our lot, firing from the air. And if it *was* this gun, it wasn’t you.”

It was bad enough Maddie suspected the reason Queenie was at her side now was because she’d had to give up on the lad whose gun they’d taken over. Bad enough. But there had also been a pilot in that ball of flame, a living young man with not much more training than Maddie herself.

"Stay here," Queenie choked. "Can you load another shell? I'll find someone who knows what they're doing to take over—you'll be needed in the tower now—"

Queenie paused a moment.

"Which way to the northeast air raid shelter from here?" she asked anxiously. "I get so muddled in the smoke."

Maddie pointed. "Straight line across the grass. Easy peasy if you're brave enough—like finding Neverland, 'Second to the right and then straight on till morning.'"

"What about you? Brave enough?"

"I'll be all right. Now I've got something to do—"

They both ducked instinctively as something exploded at the other end of the runway. Queenie squeezed Maddie around the waist and gave her a quick peck on the cheek. "'Kiss me, Hardy!' Weren't those Nelson's last words at the Battle of Trafalgar? Don't cry. We're still alive and we make a *sensational* team."

Then she hitched up her hair to its two-inch above-the-collar regulation point, swabbed her own tears and the grease and the concrete dust and the gunner's blood from her cheeks with the back of her hand, and she was off running again, like the Red Queen.

It's like being in love, discovering your best friend.

"Get your mac on," Maddie said. "I'm going to teach you to navigate."

Queenie burst out laughing. "Impossible!"

"Not impossible! There's a couple of pilots here who scrapped their way out of Poland after it was invaded. They got here with no maps, no *food*, no language other than Polish. They'll tell you all about it if you let them—bit tricky making sense of their English. Anyway, if a couple of escaped prisoners can find their way across Europe and become RAF pilots, you can—"

"You *talk* to the pilots?" Queenie interrupted with interest.

"There are other things you can do besides dance with them."

"Yes, but *talking*! How unimaginative."

"Some of them won't dance, you know, so you have to talk. That vicar's boy won't dance. Hard to get him to talk, either—but they all like jawing about maps. Or lack of maps. Come on, you don't need a map. We've got the whole day. As long as we don't go anywhere more than five miles away, so I can get back sharpish if the weather clears. But *look* at it—" Maddie waved at the window. It was pouring, rain coming down in sheets, a gale blowing.

"Just like home," Queenie said happily. "You don't get proper Scotch mist in Switzerland."

Maddie snorted. Queenie was devoted to careless name-dropping, scattering the details of her privileged upbringing without the faintest hint of modesty or embarrassment (though, after a while Maddie began to realize she only did it with people she liked or people she detested—those who didn't mind and those she didn't care about—anyone in between, or who might have been offended, she was more cautious with).

"I've got bicycles," Maddie said. "A couple of the mechanics let me borrow them. Rain doesn't stop those lads working."

"Where are we going?"

"The Green Man. Pub at the foot of the cliffs on St. Catherine's Bay, last chance before it shuts down next week. The proprietor's fed up being fired at. Not by the Germans, mind you, it's our own lads drilling the pub sign out there on the edge of the shingle, last thing before they head home after a battle—they do it for luck!"

"Bet they do it to get rid of unused ammunition."

"Well, it's a landmark, and you're the navigator. Find the coast and go south, easy peasy! You can use my compass. If you *can't* find it, I'm afraid it'll be nowt but cold beans straight from the tin for your dinner—"

"That's not fair! I'm back on shift at eleven tonight!"

Maddie rolled her eyes. "Bloomin' 'eck, that leaves us only about fifteen hours for a ten mile push-bike ride! But it'll give

me a chance to finish telling you my fears.” Maddie had her man’s greatcoat on and was tying it up around her shins so it wouldn’t catch in the bicycle chain.

“I hope you’ve got a tin opener,” Queenie said ominously, struggling into her own greatcoat. “And a spoon.”

It was astonishing, after ten minutes’ pedaling away from RAF Maidsend, how peaceful the drenched Kent countryside was. It was true that every now and then you passed a concrete gun emplacement or watchtower, but mostly you were just traveling through rolling, chalky fields, green with turnips and potatoes and mile upon mile of orchards.

“You might have brought your brolly,” Queenie said.

“I’m saving it for the next air raid.”

They came to a crossroad. There were no road signs, not one; they’d all been taken down or blacked over to confuse the enemy in the event Operation Sea Lion was successful and the German army came swarming inland. “I’ve no *idea* where we are,” Queenie wailed. The mechanic’s bike was so big for her that she couldn’t sit down on it; she had to stand on the pedals. She seemed in perpetual danger of falling off, or of being devoured by her enormous overcoat. She had the outraged, distraught look of a wet cat.

“Use the compass. Keep going east till you find the sea. Pretend,” Maddie told her, inspired. “Pretend you’re a *German spy*. You’ve been dropped here by parachute. You’ve got to find your contact, who’s at this legendary smugglers’ pub by the sea, and if anyone catches you—” under her dripping plastic rain hat, the kind you get in a tiny cardboard box with a flower on it for a halfpenny, Queenie gave Maddie a strange look. It had challenge in it, and defiance, and excitement. But also *enlightenment*. Queenie leaned forward over the handlebars of her bicycle and was off, pedaling like fury.

At the crest of a low rise, she bounded off her bike in one almighty leap like a roe deer away up the glens, and was halfway up a tree before Maddie realized what she was doing.

“Get down, you daft idiot! You’ll be soaked! You’re *in uniform!*”

“*Von hier aus kann ich das Meer sehen,*” said Queenie, which

is “I can see the sea from here” in German. (Oh—silly me. Of course it is.)

“Shut up! You lunatic!” Maddie scolded furiously. “What are you *doing*?”

“*Ich bin eine Agentin der Nazis.*” Queenie pointed. “*Zum Meer geht es da lang.*”

“You’ll get us both shot!”

Queenie considered. She looked at the teeming sky, looked at the endless dripping apple orchard, and looked at the empty road. Then she shrugged and said in English, “Don’t think so.”

“Careless talk costs lives,” Maddie quoted.

Queenie laughed so hard she slid gracelessly and painfully from one branch to a lower branch, and tore her coat climbing down. “Now just you be quiet, Maddie Brodatt. You told me to be a Nazi spy and I’m being one. I won’t let you get shot.”

(I really would like to catapult myself back there in time and kick my own teeth in.)

The outbound route to St. Catherine’s Bay was, shall we say, *creative*. It involved Queenie getting off her bicycle at every single crossroad—each one wet, windy, and featureless—and climbing a wall or gate or tree to get her bearings. Then there was always a palaver with the greatcoat as she got going again, and near misses with puddles.

“You know what I’m scared of?” Maddie yelled at the top of her voice, rain and east wind beating in her face as she pedaled energetically to keep up with the small wireless operator. “Cold tinned beans! It’s quarter to two. The pub’ll be shut by the time we get there.”

“You said it doesn’t shut till next week.”

“For the afternoon, you gormless half-wit! They stop serving till evening!”

“I think that’s frightfully unfair of you, blaming it on me,” Queenie said. “It’s your game. I’m just playing along.”

“Another thing I’m scared of,” Maddie said.

“That doesn’t count. Neither do the tinned beans. What are you most afraid of—what’s your number one fear?”

“Court-martial,” answered Maddie briefly.

Queenie, uncharacteristically, was silent. And stayed silent for some time, even while she did another of her tree-climbing surveys of the surrounding area. Finally she asked, “Why?”

It had been a good long while since Maddie had given her answer, but Queenie did not need to remind her what the subject had been.

“I keep *doing* things. I make decisions without thinking. Crikey, firing a ruddy antiaircraft gun—no authorization whatsoever, and Messerschmitt 109s circling overhead!”

“The Messerschmitt 109s circling overhead were the reason you were firing it,” Queenie pointed out. “I authorized you. I’m a flight officer.”

“You’re not *my* flight officer and you don’t have any gunnery authority.”

“What else?” Queenie asked.

“Oh—things like guiding in the German pilot the other day. I’ve done something like that before, only in English.” She told Queenie about talking down the lads in the Wellington the first time. “No one authorized that either. I didn’t get in trouble, but I should have. So stupid. Why did I do it?”

“Charity?”

“I could have killed them, though.”

“You *have* to take risks like that. There’s a war on. They could have bought it and gone down in flames themselves, without your help. But with your help they made it down safely.”

Queenie paused. Then she asked, “Why are you so *damn good* at it?”

“At what?”

“Air navigation.”

“I’m a pilot,” Maddie said—you know, she was so matter-of-fact, she wasn’t proud, she wasn’t defensive—just, *I’m a pilot*.

Queenie was outraged.

“You said you didn’t have any *skills*, you fibber!”

“I haven’t. I’m only a civil pilot. I haven’t flown for a year. I haven’t got an instructor’s rating. I’ve a good many hours, probably more than most of our lads in the Spitfires; I’ve even

flown at night. But I'm not using it. When they expand the Air Transport Auxiliary I'm going to try to join—if the WAAF'll let me go. I'll have to do a course. There's no flight training on for women at the minute."

Queenie apparently had to turn all this over in her head for a while as she considered the implications of it: Maddie Brodatt, with her unrefined South Manchester accent and her no-nonsense bike mechanic's approach to problems, was a pilot—with more practical experience than most of the young RAF Maidsend Squadron who were daily and sleeplessly hurling themselves toward flame and death against the Luftwaffe.

"You're dead quiet," Maddie said.

"Ich habe einen Platten," Queenie announced.

"Speak English, you lunatic!"

Queenie stopped her bike and climbed off. "I have a puncture. My tire's flat."

Maddie sighed heavily. She propped her own bicycle against the verge and squatted in a puddle to look. Queenie's front tire was nearly completely flat. The puncture must have happened only seconds before—Maddie could still hear the air hissing out of the inner tube.

"We'd better go back," she said. "If we go on we'll have too far to walk. I don't have a repair kit."

"O faithless one," Queenie said, pointing to the entrance to a farm lane about twenty yards farther on. "This is my plan to scrounge a meal before I meet my contact." She sniffed knowingly, nose raised into the wind. "A provincial farmhouse lies less than a hundred yards away, and I smell meat stew and fruit pie—" She took her wounded bicycle by the handlebars and set off up the lane at a determined pace. Land Army girls were hoeing among the cabbages in the adjoining field—no time off for them in the rain, either. They had sacks tied around their legs with string and ground sheets with holes in the middle for rain capes. Maddie and the disguised Nazi spy were well-equipped by comparison in their RAF men's overcoats.

A chorus of vicious dogs began to bark as they approached. Maddie looked around anxiously.

"Don't worry, that's just noise. They'll be tied up or they'd

bother the Land Girls. Is the sign up?"

"What sign?"

"A jar of rowan berries in the window—if there's no rowan in the window I won't be welcome."

Maddie burst out laughing.

"You *are* daft!"

"Is there?"

Maddie was taller than her companion. She stood on tiptoe to see over the barnyard wall, and her mouth dropped open.

"There *is*," she said, and turned to gape at Queenie. "How —?"

Queenie leaned her bicycle against the wall, looking very smug. "You can see the trees over the garden wall. They've just been trimmed. It's all very tidy and pretty in a wifely way, but she'll have dug up her geraniums to plant tatties for the War Effort. So if she has something nice to decorate her kitchen with, like fresh cut rowan berries, she's likely to do it, *and*—"

Queenie settled her hair into shape beneath the plastic rain bonnet. "*And* she's the sort of person who will feed us."

She let herself in boldly at the kitchen door of the strange farm.

"Ah've nae wish tae disturb ye, Missus—" Her well-bred, educated accent suddenly developed an irresistible Scottish burr. "We've come frae RAF Maidsend and Ah've had this wee spot o' bother wi' me bike. Ah wondered—"

"Oh, no trouble at all, love!" the farmer's wife said. "I've a couple of Land Girls boarding with me, and I'm sure we've got a puncture repair kit among us. Mavis and Grace'll be in the fields just now, but if you wait a moment I'll check the shed—Oh, and for goodness sake come in and warm yourselves first!"

Queenie produced, as if by magic, a tin of twenty-five Player's from deep in the pockets of her greatcoat. Maddie realized suddenly that this infinite supply of cigarettes was carefully hoarded—realized that she'd scarcely ever seen Queenie smoking, but that she used cigarettes as gifts or as payment in kind in place of cash—for tips and poker chips and, now, bicycle patches and lunch.

Only once, Maddie remembered, had she seen Queenie smoking a cigarette she hadn't lit for someone else—only once, when she'd been waiting to interview the German pilot.

Queenie held out the cigarettes.

"Oh, goodness no, that's *far* too much!"

"Aye, take them, let your lassies share 'em out. A gift o' thanks. But would ye no gie us a loan o' your hob to heat our wee tin o' beans before we go?"

The farmer's wife laughed merrily. "They making WAAF officers take to the roads like gypsies, are they, buying a boil of your tea can in exchange for a smoke? There's shepherd's pie and apple crumble left over from our own dinner, you can help yourselves to that! Just a minute while I find you a patch for your tube—"

They were soon tucking into a steaming hot meal considerably better than any they'd eaten at Maidsend for the past three months, including new cream to pour over the home baking. The only inconvenience was that they had to eat it standing up, as there was so much traffic through the kitchen—the chairs had been removed so as not to clutter up the passage of farmhands and Land Army Girls and dogs (no children; they'd been evacuated, away from the front line of the Battle of Britain).

"You owe me four more fears," Queenie said.

Maddie thought. She thought about most of the fears that Queenie had confessed to—ghosts, dark, getting smacked for naughtiness, the college porter. They were almost childish fears, easily bottled. You could knock them on the head or laugh at them or ignore them.

"Dogs," she said abruptly, remembering the slavering hounds on the way in. "And Not Getting the uniform Right—my hair's always too long, you're not allowed to alter the coat so it's always too big, things like that. And: Southerners laughing at my accent."

"Och aye," Queenie agreed. It could not be a problem she ever encountered, with her educated upper-crust vowels, but being a Scot, she sympathized with any distrust of the soft Southern English. "You've only one more fear to go—make it

good.”

Maddie dug deep. She came up honestly, hesitating a little at the simplicity and nakedness of the confession, then admitted: “Letting people down.”

Her friend did not roll her eyes or laugh. She listened, stirring the warm cream into the baked apples. She didn’t look at Maddie.

“Not doing my job properly,” Maddie expanded. “Failing to live up to expectations.”

“A bit like my fear of killing someone,” Queenie said, “but less specific.”

“It could include killing someone,” said Maddie.

“It could.” Queenie was sober now. “unless you were doing them a favor by killing them. Then you’d let them down if you *didn’t*. If you couldn’t make yourself. My great-uncle had horrible cancers in his throat and he’d been to America twice to have the tumors taken out and they kept coming back, and finally he asked his wife to kill him, and she did. She wasn’t charged with anything—it was recorded as a shooting accident, believe it or not, but she was my grandmother’s sister and we all know the truth.”

“How *horrible*,” Maddie said, with feeling. “How terrible for her! But—yes. You’d have to live with that selfishness afterward, if you couldn’t make yourself do it. Yes, I’m dead afraid of that.”

The farmer’s wife came in again, with a patch and a bucket to fill with water so they could find the puncture, and Maddie quickly pulled down the blackout curtains over her bright and vulnerable soul and went off to sort out the tire. Queenie stayed in the kitchen, thoughtfully lapping up the last drops of warm cream with a tin spoon.

Half an hour later, as they walked the bicycles back down the muddy farm lane and out to the road, Queenie commented, “God help us if the invading Germans turn up with Scottish accents. I got her to draw me a map. I *think* I can find the pub now.”

“Here’s your hairpin back,” Maddie said. She held out the thin sliver of steel. “You’ll want to get rid of the evidence next

time you sabotage someone's tires."

Queenie let out a peal of her giddy, infectious laughter. "*Caught!* I stuck it in too far and couldn't have got it back without you noticing. Don't be cross! It's a *game*."

"You're too good," Maddie said sharply.

"You got a hot meal out of it, didn't you? Come on, pub'll be open again by the time we get there, and we won't be able to stay long—I'm back on duty at eleven and I want a nap. But you deserve a whisky, first. My treat."

"I'm sure that's not what Nazi spies drink."

"This one does."

It was still raining as they coasted along the steep lane that wound down the cliff side to St. Catherine's Bay. The road was slick, and they went cautiously, standing on their brakes. There were a couple of miserable wet soldiers manning the gun emplacements, who waved and shouted as the girls on their bicycles came barreling past, brakes screeching with the steepness of the descent. The Green Man was open. Sitting in its bow window were RAF Maidsend's gaunt and weary squadron leader and a myopic well-turned-out civilian in a tweed suit. Everyone else was clustered around the bar.

Queenie walked purposefully to the cheerful coal fire and knelt, rubbing her hands together.

Squadron Leader Creighton rapped out a greeting that couldn't be ignored. "What chance! Come join us, ladies." He stood up and gave a little ceremonious bow, offering chairs. Queenie, comfortable with and indeed accustomed to such attention from superior officers, stood up and let her coat be taken. Maddie hung back.

"This rather small and sodden young person," said the squadron leader to the civilian, "is the heroine I was telling you about—the German speaker. This other is Assistant Section Officer Brodatt, who took the call and guided the aircraft in. Join us, ladies, join us!"

"Assistant Section Officer Brodatt is a pilot," Queenie said.

"A pilot!"

"Not at the moment," said Maddie, blushing and writhing

with embarrassment. "I'd like to join the ATA, the Air Transport Auxiliary, when they let more women in. I have a civilian license. My instructor joined in January this year."

"How extraordinary!" said the short-sighted gentleman. He peered at Maddie through lenses half an inch thick. He was older than the squadron leader, old enough he might've been refused if he'd tried to join up. Queenie shook hands with him and said gravely, "You must be my contact."

His eyebrows disappeared into his hairline. "Must I?"

Maddie said furiously, "Pay no attention to her, she's loopy. She's been playing daft games all morning—"

They all sat down.

"Her suggestion," said Queenie. "The daft games."

"It was my suggestion, but only because she's so utterly *rubbish* at finding her way anywhere. I told her to pretend to be a—"

"*Careless talk costs lives,*" Queenie interrupted.

"—spy." Maddie omitted any damning adjectives. "She was supposed to have been dropped by parachute and had to find her way to this pub."

"Not just any game," exclaimed the gentleman in the tweed suit and thick spectacles. "Not just *any* game, but the Great Game! Have you read *Kim*? Are you fond of Kipling?"

"I don't know, you naughty man, I've never kiplped," Queenie responded tartly. The civilian let out a chortle of delight. Queenie said demurely, "Of course Kipling, of course *Kim*, when I was little. I prefer Orwell now."

"Been to university?"

They established that Queenie and the gentleman's wife had been at the same college, albeit nearly twenty years apart, and traded literary quotations in German. They were obviously cut from the same well-read, well-bred, lunatic cloth.

"What's your poison?" the civilian with a penchant for Kipling asked Queenie genially. "The water of life? Do I detect a Scottish burr? Any other languages besides German?"

"Only coffee just now, as I'm on duty later; aye you do; *et oui, je suis courante en français aussi*. My grandmother and my

nanny are from Ormaie, near Poitiers. And I can do a fair parody of Aberdeen Doric and tinkers' cant, but the natives aren't fooled."

"The Doric and tinkers' cant!" The poor fellow laughed so hard he had to take off his glasses and give them a wipe with a dotted silk handkerchief. He put them back on and peered at Queenie. The lenses made his blue-green irises seem so large they were startling. "And—how *did* you manage to find your way here today, enemy agent mine?"

"It's Maddie's story," said the enemy agent generously. "And I owe her a whisky."

So Maddie told, to an appreciative audience, how she had played Watson to her friend's giddy Sherlock Holmes—of the sabotaged tire at the entrance to the well-stocked farm, and the assumptions about the dogs and the food and the flowers there. "And," Maddie finished with a triumphant flourish, "the farm woman drew her a *map*."

The so-called enemy agent glanced up at Maddie sharply. Squadron Leader Creighton held out his hand, palm up, a demand.

"I've burnt it," Queenie said in a low voice. "I popped it in the fire when we first came in. I won't tell you which farm, so don't ask."

"I shouldn't have to go to much trouble to deduce it myself," said the short-sighted civilian, "based on your friend's description."

"I am an officer." Queenie's voice was dead quiet. "I gave the woman a royal ticking off after she'd done it, and I doubt she'll need another warning. But I never lied to her, either, and she might have been more suspicious in the first place if I had. It would be inappropriate to punish anyone—apart from me, of course."

"I wouldn't dream of it. I am agog at your initiative." The man glanced at the silent Creighton. "I do believe your earlier suggestion is spot on," he said, and rather randomly quoted what Maddie reckoned was probably a line from Kipling. "Only once in a thousand years is a horse born so well fitted for the game as this our colt."

“Bear in mind,” said Creighton soberly, holding the other man’s magnified eyes with his own over the top of his steeped fingers, “these two work well together.”

clk/sd & w/op

Bloody Machiavellian English Intelligence Officer playing God.

I never knew his name. Creighton introduced him by an alias the man sometimes uses. At my interview he jokingly identified himself by a number because that’s what the British Empire spies do in *Kim* (though *we* don’t; we are told in training that numbers are too dangerous).

I liked him—don’t get me wrong—beautiful eyes behind the dreadful specs, and very lithe and powerful beneath the scholarly tweed. It was *wonderful* flirting with him, all that razor-edge literary banter, like Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*. A battle of wit, and a test, too. But he *was* playing God. I noticed, I knew it, and I didn’t care. It was such a thrill to be one of the archangels, the avengers, the chosen few.

Von Linden is about the same age as the intelligence officer who recruited me. Has von Linden an educated wife, too? (He wears a ring.) Might von Linden’s wife have been at university with my German tutor?

The sheer stark raving incredible madness of such a very ordinary possibility makes me want to put my head down on this cold table and sob.

Everything is *all so wrong*.

I have no more paper.

Oh Maddie.

I am lost. I have lost the thread. I was indulging myself in details as if they were wool blankets or alcohol, escaping wholly back into the fire-and-water-filled early days of our friendship. We made a *sensational* team.

I was so sure she'd landed safely.

It has been four days since I last wrote anything, and there is a simple reason why: no paper. When they did not come to get me the first day, I suspected, and spent the whole morning sleeping—just like a holiday. The blanket has changed my life. By the end of the second day I was getting very hungry and a bit tired of sitting in absolute pitch dark. Then those pictures. They'd already shown me the destroyed rear cabin of Maddie's Lysander, but these were new—enlargements from the pilot's cockpit.

Oh Maddie

Maddie

That was the last peaceful moment of my holiday. Also, they have been questioning that French girl again. I was lying with my nose pressed to the crack underneath the door—I'd been crying, and it is the only place I get any light—and recognized her feet as they dragged her by (she has rather pretty feet, and she is always barefoot).

I would not have slept well after those pictures anyway, but have I said before that my room is attached to the suite they use for interviews, etc.? You would have to be stone deaf to sleep through it even in a feather bed.

The following morning a trio of soldiers clapped me into chains—*chains!*—and hauled me to a subbasement, where I was sure I was going to be dissected. No, it turned out to be the kitchen—literally the *kitchen* of this desecrated hotel, which is where they cook up our delicious gray cabbage soup (they do

not bake bread here—when we get bread it is stale ends cast off from someplace else). Apparently the charwoman who scrubbed the pots, swept the floors of sawdust and spread down less moldy sawdust in its place, hauled wood and coal, emptied all the prisoners' waste buckets and slopped them out, peeled potatoes for the Gestapo officers' soup (I like to imagine she did these last two jobs without washing her hands in between)—etc.—has been sacked. More accurately, she has been arrested and sent to prison—not this one, obviously—because she stole a couple of cabbages. Anyway, yesterday and the day before they needed someone else to do all these challenging tasks while they found another drudge to replace her.

Who better suited for such work than an idle Special Operations flight officer? The chains were meant as a reminder that I am a prisoner, not an employee. Chiefly a reminder to the cook and his underlings, I think, but the cook was such a foul and filthy beast he would not have noticed if I'd been in drag as the Führer himself, so long as he could fondle my breasts.

And—I *let him do it*. For food, you might suppose, but no! (Although the old goat *did* very generously let me feast on the scraps when they'd finished peeling the tatties. I did not have to peel anything myself, as they wisely would not give me a knife.) Like an opium addict, I'll do almost anything for more paper.

The basement of the Château de Bordeaux is a warren of strangeness. Rather spooky. There are a few rooms (those with freezers and gas ovens) that they probably use for horrible experiments, but mostly these cellars are empty because they are not secure and are generally just too damn dark for productive activity. All the hotel's catering equipment is still down there—huge coffee urns, copper pans the size of bathtubs, milk cans (empty), empty wine bottles and jam pots stacked everywhere, even a row of dust-covered greasy blue aprons still hanging in a passageway. There are a number of service lifts, dumbwaiters for hauling trays upstairs in addition to the great big one for loading crates and things from the main street, and it was in exploring one of the small ones (with an eye to escaping up it if I could squeeze into it) that I discovered the paper—stacks and stacks of unused recipe cards, shoved in the dumbwaiter to get them out of the way.

I thought about Sara Crewe in *A Little Princess*, pretending she is a prisoner in the Bastille to make her work as a scullery maid more bearable. And you know... I just couldn't do it. What is the point in pretending I am in the Bastille? I have spent the past two days in *chains*, underground, slaving for a monster. Ariadne in the maze of the Minotaur? (I wish I'd thought of that earlier.) But I was too busy slaving to pretend much of anything anyway.

So—I got to take the recipe cards away with me in exchange for being groped, and managed to limit the assault by suggesting I was von Linden's personal Bit of Tartan Fluff and that the Hauptsturmführer would not like it if the cook defiled me.

O Lord! How is one to choose between the Gestapo inquisitor and the prison cook?

Of course I was not allowed to take the paper into my room with me (in case I should tear it into strips and weave it into a rope with which to hang myself, I suppose), so had to wait for a while in the big outer chamber while von Linden was busy with someone else. See me, cowering in the corner in my wrist and leg irons, clutching my armful of blank recipe cards and trying not to notice what they were doing to Jacques's fingers and toes with bits of hot metal and tongs.

After an exhausting hour or so of this melodrama, v.L. took a break and sauntered over to have a chat with me. I told him in my best Landed Gentry voice of frosty disdain how puny an empire the Third Reich must be if it can't afford to supply paper to double-crossing informants like myself, and mentioned that the foul beast in the kitchen and his skivvies are all very demoralized about the way the war is going (Italy has collapsed, German cities and factories bombed to bits, everyone expects an Allied invasion within the year—which is after all why Mssrs. Jacques and I are here, caught trying to hurry said invasion along).

Von Linden wanted to know if I'd read Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*.

I wish I had not gratified him *again* by gaping. Oh! I suppose I did let slip that I like Orwell. What was I thinking?

So then we had a genial argument about Orwellian socialism. He (v.L.) disapproves (obviously, as Orwell spent five months battling the idiot Fascists in Spain in 1937), and I (who don't always agree with Orwell either but for different reasons) said that I didn't think my experience as a scullion *exactly* matched Orwell's, if that was what v.L. was getting at, albeit we may have found ourselves working in similar French hotel basements for similar rates of pay (Orwell's somewhat higher than mine, as I seem to recall he was given an allowance of a couple of bottles of wine in addition to raw potato peelings). Eventually von Linden took possession of my recipe cards, my chains were removed, and I was thrown back into my cell.

It was a very surreal evening.

I dreamed I was back at the beginning and they were starting on me all over again, a side effect of having to watch them work on someone else. The *anticipation* of what they will do to you is every bit as sickening in a dream as when it is really going to happen.

That week of interrogation—after they'd starved me in the dark for most of a month, when they finally settled down to the more intricate task of picking information out of me—von Linden did not look at me once. He paced, I remember, but it was as though he were doing a very complicated sum in his head. There were a number of gloved assistants on hand to deal with the mess. He never seemed to *tell* them what to do; I suppose he must have nodded or pointed. It was like being turned into a technical project. The horror and humiliation weren't in that you were stripped to your underthings and being slowly taken to pieces, but in that nobody seemed to give a damn. They were not doing it for fun; they were not in it for lust or pleasure or revenge; they were not bullying me, the way Engel does; they were not angry with me. Von Linden's young soldiers were doing their job, as indifferently and accurately as if they were taking apart a wireless set, with von Linden doing his job as their chief engineer, dispassionately directing and testing and cutting off the power supply.

Only, your wireless set does not shiver and weep and curse and beg for water and be sick and wipe its nose in its hair as its wires are short-circuited and cut and fried and knotted back

together. It just sits there stoically being a wireless set. It doesn't mind if you leave it tied to a chair for three days sitting in its own effluvium with an iron rail strapped upright against its spine so it can't lean back.

Von Linden was not *any more* human grilling me about Orwell last night than when he was grilling me about those blasted codes two weeks ago. I am still nothing more than a wireless set to him. But now I am a rather *special* wireless set, one he enjoys tinkering with in his spare time—one he can secretly tune in to the BBC.

Well—four days have passed, three of them mentally and/or physically draining, and I have lost the thread. I haven't got my prescription forms to look over, or even Engel to remind me where I was. I suppose she must have other duties besides me, and may even get a day off every so often. Beastly Thibaut is here with another man today, hence I am writing like a demon, any old drivel, so as not to draw attention to myself. I hate Thibaut. I am not exactly afraid of him the way I am afraid of the cook or the Hauptsturmführer, but *buckets of blood*, I despise Thibaut—as I suppose he despises me—turncoat thugs that we are. He is crueller than von Linden, I think, enjoys it more, but has not v.L.'s genius or commitment. As long as I am writing, Thibaut leaves me alone. I just wish he did not fix these cords so savagely tight.

I forget where I had got to, and I am also panicking a bit about Time. It is the 9th day since I started, and v.L. said I could have 2 weeks. I don't know if that includes the past 4 wasted days or not, but at this rate I am not going to reach a conclusion (I think we all know I am never going to look at that stupid List again).

I will beg him for another week, in German, this evening. It puts him in a civil humor when people are formal and polite. I am sure that part of the reason I am treated as such a dangerous lunatic, apart from biting that policeman when I was arrested, is because I am always so foul-mouthed and foul-tempered. They had another British officer in here one time, an English airman, very *I-say tip-top well-bred* chap, and though he was kept under guard he was always allowed to walk about with his hands free. (I'll bet he had not got my amateur escape artist's reputation.

And I really can't help my foul temper.)

No, I *will* take a look at that list again after all. Perhaps it will give me some idea of where to pick up the story. Also, Thibaut and his mate will have to scurry about to find it, which will be entertaining.

RANDOM AIRCRAFT

Puss Moth, Tiger Moth, Fox Moth
Lysander, Wellington, Spitfire
Heinkel He 111, Messerschmitt 109
AVRO ANSON!

AIR TAXI WITH THE ATA

How could I forget the Anson!

I don't know how you manage to keep the Luftwaffe supplied with serviceable aircraft. The Air Transport Auxiliary is how we manage with the RAF, ferrying planes and taxiing pilots. A constant and steady supply of broken planes coaxed back to repair sites, new ones delivered from factory to operational base—all flown by civilian pilots, no instruments, no radio, no guns. Navigating by trees and rivers, railway tracks and the long straight scars of Roman roads. Hitchhiking back to base for the next assignment.

Dympna Wythenshawe (remember her?) was one of these ferry pilots. One blustery autumn afternoon when the frantic days of the Battle of Britain had faded and flared into the explosive nights of the London Blitz, Dympna landed at RAF Maidsend in a twin-engined transport plane, delivering three pilots who were to fly broken Spitfires away for repair. (Three lads. They didn't let lassies fly fighter planes, not even broken ones, till a bit later in the war. Not much later.) Dympna came into the canteen for a hot cup of something, and there was

Maddie.

After they'd finished hugging and laughing and exclaiming (Dympna knew where Maddie was stationed, but Maddie hadn't been expecting Dympna), and had consumed cups of Camp Coffee (chicory extract and hot water, *blechhh*), Dympna said, "Maddie, come fly the Anson."

"What?"

"You can have the pilot's seat. I want to see if you remember how to fly."

"I've never flown an Anson!"

"You've flown my Rapide a dozen times. The Annie's got twin engines too, not so different. Well...a bit bigger. And quite a lot more powerful. And it's a monoplane, with a retractable undercarriage—"

Maddie gave an incredulous bark of laughter. "Not so different!"

"But I'll take care of the undercarriage. It's a right pig to raise and lower, you have to do it by hand, 150 turns—"

"Done that on a Wellington," Maddie said smugly.

"There you are!" Dympna cried. "No worries, then. Come along, I've got to make a hop to RAF Branston and drop off another ferry pilot."

She looked around the canteen approvingly. "It's *so nice* to land at an airfield where you can get hot buttered toast. So many airfields are strictly Boys Only, with a cold sitting room for the ladies, usually empty. Heaven help you if you can't get off the airfield before blackout—I had to spend the night in the back of a Fox Moth once. I nearly froze to death."

Maddie looked away, her eyes welling with tears of envy at the thought of a frozen lonely night in the back of a Fox Moth. She'd not touched an aircraft's flight controls since before the war started. She'd never flown anything so big or so complicated as an Avro Anson.

Queenie was walking toward them, carrying her own cup of steaming black engine oil. Dympna stood up.

"I've got to get going before I lose the light," she said casually. "Do come, Maddie. I'll drop you here again on my way

back. It's only a twenty minute hop each way. Take off, fly straight and level—"

"Second to the right, and then straight on till morning," Queenie said. "Hello! You must be Dympna Wythenshaw." "

"And you must be Maidsend's impromptu crack gunner!"

Queenie gave a little bow. "I am a gunner on Tuesday mornings only. Just now I am in Bomb Disposal. See?" She held up her own half-slice of dry toast. "Out of butter already."

"I'm about to take your friend Maddie for a flight lesson," Dympna said. "An hour off base. There's room for one more, if you're free."

Maddie saw no flinch or blanch pass over the fair skin. But Queenie said calmly, putting her cup on the table, "No, I don't think so." Then she repeated every one of Maddie's own objections. "She's not flown this type. She said so. And only as a civilian." She articulated exactly how long since Maddie had piloted a plane, a known fact. "A year ago. More than a year."

Reason had been hammering at Maddie. She'd thought in rapid succession: I shouldn't leave base, I don't know what I'm doing, it's probably illegal, I'll be court-martialed, and so forth. But now she made up her mind. Reminded how long it had been since she had flown a plane, Maddie made up her mind. It had been far too long.

"Now," Maddie said. "Now I wear Air Force blue and already this year I've been fired on in the air and I've shot down an enemy plane myself, or as good as. And Dympna's my instructor and I'm a pilot and *you*—"

Queenie needed twisting. She was still on her feet, still clutching her untouched toast.

"Pretend," Maddie told her, inspired. "Pretend you're Jamie. Your favorite brother, the one you worry about, on a training mission. You're sure and full of yourself. You've done your solo in a Tiger Moth, and now you're going along as a stooge, and all you have to do is raise and lower the undercarriage, which will leave the instructor free to concentrate on the tyro pilot—"

Suddenly Maddie faltered. "You're not really afraid of heights, are you?"

“A Wallace and a Stuart, feart o’ *anythin*?”

Maddie thought it must be like having a little brass peg in your mind, like the hinged switch on an electric hall light, and when you flipped it you turned instantly into another person. Queenie’s stance was different, her feet slightly farther apart and flat on the floor, her shoulders squared back. Perhaps more like a drill sergeant than her Eton-educated older brother, but certainly more man than any WAAF flight officer. She cocked her blue cap back at a hellish angle.

“High time they put the RAF in kilts,” she remarked, flipping the hem of her uniform skirt disdainfully.

Maddie said a silent, secret thank-you to Adolf Hitler for giving her this utterly daft chameleon for a friend, and chummed Queenie out to the airfield, following Dympna.

The sky was low and gray and wet. “You’ll get an hour in your logbook, P1 under training,” Dympna told Maddie over her shoulder as they crossed to the Anson. “Taxi, takeoff, and a full flight to RAF Branston. I’ll talk you through the landing there, and you can try it yourself when we get back to Maidsend.”

There was a lad (a real one) giving the aircraft the once-over when they reached it, and chatting with a couple of ground crew. He turned out to be Dympna’s other passenger, the other ferry pilot on her taxi run. He glanced up at Dympna as she approached and gave a laugh, and exclaimed in a broad American accent, “Well, look what we have here—three gorgeous English gals to fly with!”

“Yankee idiot!” cursed the youthful blue-kilted bomber pilot. “I am a *Scotsman*.”

Maddie climbed in first. She crawled forward through the fuselage (ex-civil passenger aircraft, impressed by the RAF like Dympna’s Puss Moth) and into the left-hand seat, the pilot’s seat. Then she sat scanning the collection of gauges and instruments. She was surprised by how many of them were the friendly, familiar faces of dials she knew: rev counter, airspeed indicator, altimeter—and when she took hold of the flight controls and felt the ailerons and elevator responding reliably to her command, for one moment she thought she was going to cry

properly. Then she glanced over her shoulder and saw her passengers climbing in behind her. Dympna slid her elegant length into the right-hand seat beside Maddie, and Maddie pulled herself together. On her behalf, a random squall peppered the panes of the cockpit with fat raindrops for about ten seconds. Then the shower stopped suddenly, like a squirt of machine gun fire.

What's a lass like you need with a big toy like this?

Maddie laughed aloud, and said to Dympna, "Run me through the checks."

"What's so funny?"

"This is the biggest toy ever."

"We'll get bigger ones soon," Dympna assured her.

To Maddie it felt like the last day of school, like the summer holidays beginning.

"Two fuel tanks in each wing," said Dympna. "Two oil pressure gauges, two throttle levers. But only one mixture control—set that to normal for start-up. The ground crew takes care of the priming pumps—" (I am making this up. You get the idea.)

Maddie had taxied this familiar airfield and roared down the rutted runway in her head so many times it felt as though she'd done it before; or as though she were dreaming now. The Anson leaped into the air in a gust of headwind. Maddie fought the aircraft for a while, straightened the rudder, felt the speed increase as Dympna's laborious cranking of the undercarriage began to progress and the extra drag fell away. The wings lifted and dipped in the blustering wind like a motorboat riding swells. It was lovely flying a low-winged plane, with its unblocked, endless view of sky—or, on that occasion, low-hanging cloud.

"Hey, Scottie!" Dympna ordered, shouting over the engines. "Stop squeaking and give me a hand."

The whimpering Scot crept toward the cockpit, keeping low to the floor of the aircraft to avoid having to look out. Maddie glanced over her shoulder; she could tell her friend was manfully battling some demon or other.

"If you're scared, *do something*," Maddie shouted, not

without irony.

The Scot, whey-faced and determined, reached down alongside the pilot's seat and took hold of the undercarriage crank. "My real fear," Scottie gasped, giving the crank a turn, "is not of heights"—another turn—"but of being sick."

"Doing something should help," yelled the Yank from the back, enjoying the view ahead of him for different reasons than the rest of them.

"Looking at the horizon helps," yelled Maddie, her own farseeing eyes focused on the distant place where the battered gray land met tumultuous gray cloud. Conversation was not really possible. Most of Maddie's being was absorbed in flying the buffeting Anson. But a little corner of her mind was sorrowing that her friend's first flight was not being made through a still summer evening of golden light over the green Pennines.

Maddie landed the Anson into wind with a wallop, and Dymrna kept her hands to herself, letting Maddie do it. The Yank said it was a whale of a landing, which he meant as a compliment. Afterward the Scot stood quivering on the runway with gritted teeth while the aircraft was refueled and the Branston ground crew chatted with the ferry pilots. Maddie stood close by, not close enough to touch, not anything so babyish. But offering silent sympathy.

Minus the Yank ferry pilot, the Anson crew set off back to Maidsend. Fitful sunlight, low on the horizon, gleamed through the heavy cloud in the west, and Maddie, rather desperate to improve the experience for her suffering passenger, was able to climb a little higher, where the wind was brisker and not so gusty. (The ferry pilots are not allowed to fly higher than 5000 feet. Engel will have to do the metric conversion—sorry about that.)

Blooming crosswind, Maddie swore to herself as they crawled back toward home.

"Still feeling sick?" Dymrna bellowed at the hapless Scot. "Come sit in the front."

The Scot, in weakened state, was easily bullied (as you know). Dymrna crawled out of her forward seat and Scottie

crawled into it.

Maddie glanced at her friend, grinned, and took hold of the finely manicured hand that gripped the edge of the copilot's seat. She forced the hand around the flight controls.

"Hold this," she bellowed. "See how we're slant against the sun? 'Cause there's a whopper of a crosswind, so we have to crab. Just like sailing. You point the plane sideways. Got it?"

Scottie nodded, face pale, jaw set, eyes alight.

"See?" Maddie held her own empty hands aloft. "You're in control. You're flying the plane. The Flying Scotsman!"

The Flying Scotsman squeaked again.

"Don't cling to it—just hold it gently—Oh, well done."

They beamed at each other for a moment. Then they looked back at the sky.

"Dympna!" cried Maddie. "Look, look at the *sun*!"

It was green.

God's truth—the rim of the lowering sun, all they could see of it, had turned green. It was sandwiched in between a bank of low dark haze and a higher bank of dark cloud, and just along the upper edge of the haze was this bright lozenge of flaming green, like Chartreuse liqueur with light behind it. Maddie had never seen anything like it.

"My God—" Dympna whispered something to this effect, but no one heard her. She laid a hand on each girl's shoulder, gripping them hard.

"Fly the plane, Maddie," she commanded hoarsely, an instructor's reminder.

"I am."

Maddie flew the plane, but she stared at the sun's green edge, too, for a long, wind-buffed glorious half minute. Thirty seconds it lasted, green sunlight breaking the cloud on the horizon. Then the light winked out below the haze again and all three pilots were left blinded in the dull gloom of a showery autumn afternoon.

"What was it? Dympna, what was it? A test? A new bomb? What—"

Dympna relaxed her grip on their shoulders.

“It’s called the green flash,” she said. “It’s just a mirage, a trick of the light. Nothing to do with the war.” She let out a little gasp of delight. “Oh! My father saw it once when he was camping on Kilimanjaro, years ago. Get to work, Scottie; undercarriage needs lowering. And I need the instructor’s seat back to make sure Brodatt lands us safely.”

Down on earth, Dympna tossed out the two tyros and took off again without herself setting foot on the ground at Maidsend, hurrying back to her own base before it got dark or the weather closed in (ATA pilots are able to authorize their own flights).

Queenie, herself again, took hold of Maddie’s hand and squeezed it tightly. She walked all the way back across the airfield without letting it go. Maddie closed her eyes and flew again in the ethereal pale green light. She knew she would never let it go.

I’m sorry. This has got absolutely bugger all to do with Air Taxi.

But it was that flight that shoehorned Maddie into the ATA. She was released to them by the WAAF, not seconded—a somewhat unusual procedure then, though they did more of it later in the war; unusual because the ATA is a civilian organization and the WAAF military. But Maddie had been on the ATA’s waiting list since it was drawn up, and having Dympna on her side put her at an advantage over other applicants who might have been equally qualified. The women on the waiting list were all far more qualified than the men, because the qualified men didn’t have to wait. Also, Maddie’s Oakway night flying and fog line landings made her a bit special (*night and fog*, brrrr, even innocently and in English it makes me shiver). Lads with her experience were flying bombers now. The ATA needed her.

They fly without radio or navigation aids. They do have maps, but they are not allowed to mark balloons or new airfields on them, in case they lose the maps and you lot pick them up. Maddie did a training course when she joined, early in 1941, and she had one instructor who told her, “You don’t need

a map. Just fly this heading for as long as it takes to smoke two cigarettes. Then turn and fly the next heading for another cigarette.” You can fly hands-free and light a cigarette mid-flight pretty easily if the aircraft is set up properly—CDF, Cigarette Direction Finding.

About the same time Maddie joined the Air Transport Auxiliary, her friend the wireless operator was seconded to the SOE, the Special Operations Executive. Maddie did not know this. They’d been swapping letters for a while after Maddie left Maidsend, and then suddenly Queenie’s letters started arriving from an undisclosed address and were full of black censor’s marks, as though they were coming from a soldier in North Africa. And then Queenie asked her to write to her at home, which had the impressively simple (and palindromic!) address of Craig Castle, Castle Craig (Aberdeenshire). But she was not at home. That was just for forwarding purposes. So they did not see each other most of that year except:

1) When Queenie turned up unexpectedly during a break in the Manchester Blitz, and they spent three wet and stormy days burning black market petrol up and down the Pennines on Maddie’s Silent Superb.

2) When one of Queenie’s Top Ten Fears materialized and her favorite brother Jamie the bomber pilot (the real Jamie) and his crew got shot down. Jamie spent a night floating in the North Sea and afterward had to have four frozen fingers and all his toes amputated. Maddie went to visit him when he was in hospital. In fact she had never met him before, and perhaps that wasn’t the best time to meet him, but Queenie actually sent Maddie a telegram—only the second telegram she’d ever got—asking her to come along to see him, and Maddie did. It was perhaps not the best time to meet Queenie, either.

3) When Queenie was sent up to Oakway for parachute training. And they weren’t allowed to talk to each other that time.

That should be a separate section, SOE Parachute Drops. But I have not got to that bit yet, and now von Linden is just arriving, and I will have to translate what I have written today for him myself, since Engel is not here.

I am alone. O God. I have tried to undo Thibaut's knots, but I can't reach them with both hands. I was translating today's writing for von Linden, my elbows on the table and my head between my hands, not daring to look at him. I'd already asked him for more time, and he'd said he would consider it after he'd heard today's material. And I know I have given him nothing today. Nothing but the events of the past two weeks, which he already knows, and the green flash. Almighty Christ. After I'd got to the bit about the cook feeling me up—so embarrassing, but if I'd skipped it and v.L. found out later, I'd pay for it in blood—he came over and stood by me. I had to look up. When I did, he took a handful of my hair and held it lightly off the back of my neck for a moment.

He never smiles or frowns or *anything*. I could feel my face flaming. Oh why did I have to put down that coarse, filthy sarcasm about choosing between the cook and the inquisitor? I could not tell what he was thinking. He rubbed my hair gently between his fingers.

Then he said one word. It sounds the same in English and French and German. *Kerosene*.

And he left me here with the door closed.

I would like to write something heroic and inspired before I go up in fireworks, but I am too stupid and sick with dread to think of anything. I can't even think of anyone else's memorable defiance to repeat. I wonder what William Wallace said when they were tying him to the horses that would rip him into quarters. All I can think of is Nelson saying, "Kiss me, Hardy."

They have WASHED MY HAIR. That was what the kerosene was for this time. FLAMING HEAD LICE. Now I stink of explosive but I have not got nits.

Just after the Hauptsturmführer left me last night there was an air raid and everybody scrambled to the shelters as usual. I sat weeping and waiting for two hours, just as I did sometimes during that week of interrogation, begging God and the RAF for a direct hit that they NEVER DELIVER. After it was over, no one came back for another hour. THREE HOURS without anyone telling me what was going on. I expect v.L. was hoping that in my panic I would write something more productive as a last resort, only I struggled so much trying to get my legs free that the chair I was tied to fell over. Needless to say, I could not write in such a state (and did not even consider calling for help). Eventually, a number of people came in and found me doing a frantic imitation of an upside-down tortoise.

I had managed to drag myself and my chair over to the door and prepared an ambush that sent two guards sailing head over heels as they tripped on me when they came in. Von Linden really should know me well enough by now to realize that I am not going to face my execution without a fight. Or with anything remotely resembling dignity.

When they had got me resurrected and pulled up to the table again, von Linden came in and laid a single white pill in front of me. Like Alice, I was suspicious. I still thought I was about to be executed, you see.

“Cyanide?” I asked tearfully. It would be such a humane way to go.

But it was not a suicide tablet, it turns out. It was an aspirin.

Like Engel, he does pay attention.

He has given me another week. But he has doubled my

workload. We made a deal. Another one. Truly I thought I couldn't possibly have anything left of my soul to sell to him, but we have managed to strike another bargain. He has a tame American radio announcer who does Nazi propaganda in English aimed at the Yanks—she works from Paris for Berlin's broadcasting service, and she has been badgering the Ormaie Gestapo for an interview. She wants to give her American battleship audiences a sugarcoated inside perspective on Occupied France: how well prisoners are treated, how stupid and dangerous it is that the Allies force innocent girls like me to do dirty work like mine, blah blah blah. Despite her shining legitimate Third Reich radio credentials, the Ormaie Gestapo are reluctant to respond, but von Linden believes he can *use me* to make a good impression. "I would not be here if my own government were not so ruthlessly inhumane," I will tell her for him. "By contrast, see how humanely the Germans deal with captured agents? See how I am doing translation work, neutrally occupying myself while I await trial?" (A joke—they will not give me a trial.)

(After my second escape attempt, while they were waiting for von Linden to turn up and pronounce punishment, a couple of his stupid subordinates casually blabbed a great many administrative secrets in front of me, not realizing I understand German. So I know a lot more about their plans for me than I'm supposed to know. I fall under a sickening policy called *Nacht und Nebel*, Night and Fog, which allows them to do whatever the hell they feel like to people suspected to be "endangering security," and then make them disappear—really disappear. They don't execute them here; they ship them off without leaving a trace, into the "night and fog." Oh, God—I am a Night and Fog prisoner. It is so secret they don't even write it down—just use the initials "NN." If this manuscript survives me, they will probably black out everything I've just written. It is not really *Nacht und Nebel* policy to grant interviews for radio broadcasts, but these Gestapo are opportunists if nothing else. They can always chop me into bits afterward and bury the scraps in the cellar.)

If I cooperate with the propagandist I can have more time. If I tell the bleak truth—then no. And they'll probably make the American broadcaster disappear, too, and I'll have that on my

conscience.

The aspirin and kerosene are part of Operation Cinderella, a program designed to transform me from a feverish, nit-infested, mentally unstable prison rat back into a detained flight officer of cool nerve and confidence, suitable for presentation to a radio interviewer. To add credibility to our story, I have been given a sort of translation job copying Hauptsturmführer von Linden's own notes from the past year here, with names (when he knows them) and dates and, ugh, some *methods* used, in addition to information extracted. Oh, mein Hauptsturmführer, *you are an evil Jerry bastard*. A copy is to be made in German for his C.O. (he has a Commanding Officer!) and another made in French for some other official purpose. I am doing the French one. Fräulein Engel is doing the German (she is back today). We are working together and using up all my ill-gotten recipe cards. We are both cross about that.

The job is both horrific and unbelievably tedious. And so deviously *instructional* it makes me want to put the man's eyes out with my pencil. I am made to see into a small methodical corner of von Linden's mind, not anything personal, but *how he works*. And also that he is good at it—unless, of course, it is all fabricated to intimidate me. I don't actually think he is imaginative enough to do that—at least, not in the way I use my imagination, not to pretend anything, not to concoct a fake collection of half a dozen notebooks bound in calfskin and filled with tragic miniature portraits of a hundred and fifty doomed spies and Resistance fighters.

But he is creative in his own scientific way—a technician, an engineer, an analyst. (I'd love to know what his civilian credentials are.) His persuasive techniques are tailored to the individual as he gains understanding into the character of each. Those three weeks I spent starving in the dark, waiting for something to happen—he must have been watching me like a hawk, tallying my silences, my tantrums, my numerous half-successful attempts to clamber out the transom window, the heating duct, the air vent, to pick the lock, garrote and/or emasculate various guards, etc. Observing how I cower and weep and plead whenever the screaming starts in the next room. Observing how I frantically try to put my hair up

whenever someone opens the door and sees me (not everyone is questioned in their dreadful undergarments—it is a special torment reserved for the modest and the vain. I am one of the latter).

It is comforting to discover that I am not, after all, the only Judas to have been interned behind these desecrated hotel walls. I suppose von Linden would be sacked if his success rate were that dismal. And now I suspect, as well, that I am exposed to the stubborn ones on purpose to demoralize me, perhaps with the dual effect of humiliating them at their most vulnerable moments with an embarrassing and appreciative audience.

I am still quite presentable. They have always gone easy on my hands and face, so when I'm fully dressed you'd never look at me and think I'd recently been skewered and barbecued—they've packed their partially dismantled wireless set into a smooth and pleasing case. Perhaps it has been v.L.'s intention all along to use me in his little propaganda exercise. And of course—I am *willing to play*. How did he know? How did he know from the start, even before I told him? That I am *always* willing to play, addicted to the Great Game?

Oh, mein Hauptsturmführer, you evil Jerry bastard, I am grateful for the eiderdown they have given me to replace the verminous blanket. Even if it is just part of the temporary scheme to rehabilitate me, it is bliss. Half the stuffing has come out and it smells like a root cellar full of damp; but still, an *eiderdown*—a *silk eiderdown*! It is embroidered "C d B" so it must be spoiling stock from this building's former life as the Château de Bordeaux. I do sometimes wonder what happened to the hotel's furnishings. Someone must have gone to a good deal of effort to empty all the guest rooms of their wardrobes and beds and vanity tables and to bolt bars across the window shutters. What did they do with everything—carpets, curtains, lamps, lightbulbs? Certainly my little room has no Gallic charm to recommend it apart from its rather pretty parquet floor, which I can't see most of the time (as with all the prisoners' rooms, my window has been boarded shut), and which is very cold and hard to sleep on.

I had better get to work—though I have bought my extra

week, I now have only half as much time each day for writing. And my day is longer, too.

I am getting tired.

I know, I know. Special Ops Exec. Write—

FERRY PILOT

Maddie went back to Oakway. There was now an Air Transport Auxiliary ferry pool there, and Oakway had also become the biggest parachute training center in Britain. As an ATA pilot Maddie was demoted in rank, and a civilian again, but she was able to live at home, *and* she was given a petrol allowance for her bike so she could get to the airfield, *and* she could trade in a day's completed ferry chit for a two-ounce bar of Cadbury's milk chocolate.

Maddie was in her element at last. No matter that the sky had changed—it was an obstacle course of balloon cables and restrictions and military aircraft and, often, dirty weather. Maddie was in her element, and her element was air.

They throw you through some aerobatics that you'll never use, watch you take off and land something, and hey presto, you're qualified to fly Class 3 aircraft (light twin engines) and all the Class 2s (heavy single engines) without ever having seen most of them. Maddie said they are supposed to do thirty long-distance training flights up and down the country to imprint it on their brains until they can fly without looking at a map, but she got signed off at twelve because it was taking too long to wait for decent weather, and they wanted her working. There is an ATA pilot killed every week. They are not shot down by enemy fire. They fly without radio or navigation aids into weather that the bombers and fighters call "unflyable."

So Maddie, first day on the job, walks into the hut that the Oakway ATA pilots laughingly call their "Mess Hall."

"There's a Lysander chalked up here with your name on it," says her new Operations officer, pointing to the blackboard with its list of aircraft to be moved.

“Is there *really*?”

Everyone laughs at her. But not meanly.

“Never flown one, have you,” says the Dutchman, a former KLM pilot who knows the north of England almost as well as Maddie does, having made regular passenger landings at Oakway from the time it opened.

“Well,” says Ops, “Tom and Dick are taking the Whitleys over to Newcastle. And Harry is taking the Hurricane. That leaves the taxi Anson and the Lysander for the ladies. And Jane’s got the Anson.”

“Where’s the Lysander going?”

“Elmtree, for repair. Faulty tailplane handwheel. It’s flyable, but you have to hold the control column right forward.”

“I’ll do it,” says Maddie.

NOT A SAFE JOB

They gave her a very thorough navigation briefing beforehand, as the aircraft’s defect meant she couldn’t expect to fly hands-free. She wouldn’t be able to juggle maps en route. She sat studying the pilot’s notes for an hour (the detailed notes they give the operational pilots who’ll only ever fly one type of aircraft), then panicked about losing the weather. Now or never.

The ground crew was aghast at the idea of a girl flying the broken Lysander.

“She won’t be strong enough. With the tail set for takeoff yon slip of a lass won’t be able to hold the stick hard for’ard enough for landing. Don’t know if anyone could.”

“Someone landed it here,” Maddie pointed out. She’d already been given the chit for the job and wanted to leave while she could still see the Pennines. “Look, I’ll just set it neutral by hand before I get in. Easy peasy—”

And she gently pushed the tail into place, stood back, and dusted her hands on her slacks (navy, with an Air Force blue

shirt and navy tunic and cap).

The mechanics were still frowning, but they'd stopped shaking their heads.

"It'll be a pig to fly," Maddie said. "I'll just keep the climb-out and landing nice and long and shallow. Come in fast, eighty-five knots, and the automatic flaps'll stay up. It's not too windy. Should be fine."

At last one of the lads gave a slow, reluctant nod.

"Tha'll manage, lass," he said. "I can see tha'll manage."

That first ATA flight Maddie made was hard work. Not frightening; just hard work. It was hard, at first, to look past the gunsight sockets and camera fixing plates and rows and rows of bomb selector switches for bombs she wasn't carrying, a Morsing key for a radio that wasn't connected, etc.

Fly the plane, Maddie.

The six familiar, friendly faces of the flight instrument panel smiled at her behind the control column. One of the ground crew anxiously made sure she knew where to find the forced-landing flare release.

The weather cooperated for her, but the Lysander fought her for nearly two hours. When she tried to land at Elmtree she misjudged the amount of runway she was going to need. Hands and wrists aching with the effort of keeping the control column far enough forward to land, Maddie took off again without touching down, and had to come in over the runway twice more before she got it right. But she landed safely at last.

I sound so authoritative! It must be the immediate effect of the aspirin. Imagine if you gave me Benzedrine. (And I still crave coffee.)

Maddie, also craving coffee, went to scrounge a sandwich from the workshop canteen, and found another ferry pilot there ahead of her—tall, square-faced, with dark brown hair shorter than Maddie's, in uniform navy slacks and tunic with the double gold shoulder stripes of a first officer. For a moment Maddie was confused, thinking that, like Queenie, she was seeing ghosts.

"Lyons!" Maddie exclaimed.

The pilot looked up, frowned, and answered tentatively, “Brodatt?”

Then Maddie saw it wasn’t the vicar’s son who used to fly at Maidsend before being shot down and incinerated in flaming petrol over the South Downs last September, but someone who clearly must be his twin sister. Or an ordinary sister, anyway. They stared at each other in bewilderment for a moment. They had never met.

The other girl beat her to the question. “But how do you know my name?”

“You look exactly like your brother! I was a WAAF at Maidsend with him. We used to talk about maps—he wouldn’t ever dance!”

“That was Kim,” said the girl, smiling.

“I liked him. I’m sorry.”

“My name’s Theo.” She offered Maddie her hand. “I’m in the women’s ferry pool at Stratfield.”

“How do you know *my* name?” Maddie asked.

“It’s chalked up on the assignment board in the radio room,” First Officer Lyons said. “We’re the only ATA pilots here today. They usually send girls in the Lysanders—the lads all want something faster. Have a sandwich. You look like you could use one.”

“I’ve never flown a Lysander before,” said Maddie, “and I wish I never would again. This one just about killed me.”

“Oh, you brought in the faulty tailplane! It’s terribly unfair of them to give you a broken Lizzie on your first go. You must have another go *immediately*, flying one that works.”

Maddie took the offered half sandwich—bully beef straight from the tin as usual. “Well, I have to, I suppose,” she said. “I’ve got to take one from here down to its normal base this afternoon. It’s not top priority but it’s got one of those “S” chits, secrecy and a report required. It’s my first day on the job, too.”

“You lucky thing, that’s RAF Special Duties!”

“RAF Special Duties?”

“Your guess is as good as mine. They’re sort of embedded in the normal RAF base that you fly in to, but after you’ve

landed there two or three times you start to work it out—a little fleet of Lysanders camouflaged in black and dark green, all equipped with long-range fuel tanks, and the runway laid out with electric lamps. Night landings in short fields—”

She let that hang between them. France, Belgium, Resistance agents, refugees, wireless equipment and explosives smuggled into Nazi-occupied Europe—you didn’t dare talk about it. You just didn’t.

“It’s brilliant fun landing a Lizzie in their training field. They have a mock flare path laid out, little yellow flags, you can play you’re a Special Duties pilot. Lysanders are wizard at short landings. You could land one in your granny’s garden.”

Maddie could scarcely believe that, having just managed to get her first Lizzie down only by using every available inch of runway.

Theo pulled her crust to pieces and arranged three crumbs in an inverted L-shape to imitate torches blazing in a dark French meadow. “Here’s what you do—” She glanced quickly over each shoulder to make sure she wasn’t overheard. “They’re always a bit boggled when a girl leaps out of the cockpit afterward.”

“They were a bit boggled when I got in this morning!”

“How’s your navigation? You’re not allowed to mark this airfield on your map. Takes a bit of studying before you leave, so you can find it yourself.”

“I can manage that,” Maddie said confidently and truthfully, having earlier that day done almost exactly the same thing.

“It’ll be fun,” Theo repeated enthusiastically, encouraging her. “You couldn’t get better training if they gave you a course! Flying a broken plane for two hours then landing a fixed one in twenty yards in the same day—we might as well be *operational*.”

All right, this airfield, the Special Duties airfield. It is the same one Maddie and I took off from six weeks ago. The pilots who use it are called the Moon Squadron—they fly by moonlight and only by moonlight. The location of their airfield is one of our most closely guarded secrets and I thank *God* I

don't know its name or have any clue where it is. I really don't; though I have been there at least five times, I was always flown there from my own base outside Oxford, in the dark, sometimes via another aerodrome, and I don't even know in which direction we set off to get there. They did that on purpose.

Special Duties planes need a lot of maintenance as they tend to go through them quite rapidly, bashing the undercarriages in the dark and getting bits blown off by anti-aircraft guns on their way home. Later Maddie made that run several times, ferrying damaged or mended aircraft in and out of the bigger aerodrome that surrounds them and hides them. More recently she served them as a taxi pilot delivering their rather special passengers. The dozen or so quite suicidally deranged pilots who are stationed there grew familiar with Maddie's increasingly expert dead-stop accurate short-field landings, and by and by they knew when she'd arrived before she got out of the plane.

I am out of time again—hell. I was enjoying myself

Engel thinks I am translating von Linden's horrid notes, but I am sneaking in a few recipe cards of my own because I have got ahead of her.

She can be a perfect fount of information when she's in the mood. It is because of her nattering on at me while I was hard at work that she has fallen behind. She tells me that if I am lucky I will be sent to a place called Ravensbrück when they are finished with me here. It is a concentration camp solely for women, a labor camp and prison. Perhaps it is where the charwoman who stole the cabbages was sent. Basically it is a death sentence—they more or less starve you until you can't work, and then when you become too weak to shift any more rubble for replacing the roads blown up by our Allied bombers, they hang you. (I am ideally suited for shifting rubble, having previous experience on the runway at Maidsend.) If you are not put to work breaking rocks, you get to incinerate the bodies of your companions after they have been hanged.

If I am *not* lucky—in other words, if I do not produce a satisfactory report in the time allotted—I will be sent to a place called Natzweiler-Struthof. This is a smaller and more specialized concentration camp, the vanishing point for *Nacht und Nebel* prisoners, who are mostly men. Occasionally women are sent there as live specimens for medical experiments. I am not a man, but I am designated *Nacht und Nebel*.

God.

If I am *very* lucky—I mean if I am clever about it—I will get myself shot. Here, soon. Engel didn't tell me this; I thought it out myself. I have given up hoping the RAF will blow this place to smithereens.

I want to update my list of "10 Things I Am Afraid Of."

1) Cold. (I've replaced my fear of the dark with Maddie's fear of being cold. I don't mind dark now, especially if it's quiet. Gets boring sometimes.)

- 2) Falling asleep while I'm working.
- 3) Bombs dropping on my favorite brother.
- 4) Kerosene. Just the word on its own is enough to reduce me to jelly, which everybody knows and makes use of to great effect.
- 5) SS-Hauptsturmführer Amadeus von Linden. Actually he should be at the top of this list (the man blinds me with fear), but I was taking the list in its original order and he has replaced the college porter.
- 6) Losing my pullover. I suppose that counts under cold. But it is something I worry about separately.
- 7) Being sent to Natzweiler-Struthof.
- 8) Being sent back to England and having to file a report on What I Did In France.
- 9) Not being able to finish my story.
- 10) Also of finishing it.

I am no longer afraid of getting old. Indeed I can't believe I ever said anything so stupid. So childish. So offensive and *arrogant*.

But mainly, so very, very stupid. I desperately want to grow old.

Everybody is getting excited about the American radio woman's visit. My interview will be held in von Linden's study, office, whatever it is. I was taken to see it earlier today so that I would be forewarned and not fall over in a dead faint of astonishment seeing it for the first time in front of the interviewer (pretend *all* my "interviews" take place beneath the Venetian glass chandelier in this cozy wood-paneled den. Pretend I sit writing at his pretty little eighteenth-century marquetry table every afternoon. Pretend I ask his *pet cockatoo* in its bamboo cage to supply me with unfamiliar German words when I get stuck).

(Or perhaps not. The helpful cockatoo might seem a little too far-fetched.)

I am not writing there now—I am in my usual bare broom cupboard, pulled up to the tubular steel table with my ankles tied to my chair, with SS-Scharführer Thibaut and his mate whose name I haven't been told breathing down my neck.

I am going to write about Scotland. I wasn't ever there with Maddie but I feel as though I was.

I don't know what she was flying the night she got stuck at Deeside, near Aberdeen. It wasn't just Lysanders that she ferried, and she didn't do much taxi work that first year, so it probably wasn't an Anson. Let's say it was a Spitfire, just for fun—the most glamorous and beloved of fighter planes—even the Luftwaffe pilots would let you pull out their back teeth with a pair of pliers if it would buy them an hour in control of a Spitfire. Let's say that late in November of '41 Maddie was delivering a Spitfire to this Scottish airfield where they'd fly out to defend the North Sea shipping, or perhaps to take pictures of Luftwaffe-occupied airfields in Norway.

Our reconnaissance planes are tarted up in a lovely salmony-mauve camouflage to match the clouds. So let's say Maddie was flying a pink Spitfire, but not up to the soaring blue heavens like the fighter pilots. She was flying cautiously, making her way along the coast and up the straths, the wide valleys of Scotland, because the cloud was low. She was 3000 feet above sea level, but between the Tay and the Dee, the Cairngorm Mountains rise higher than that. Maddie flew alone, careful and happy, low over the snow-tipped Highlands on those pretty tapered wings, deafened by the Merlin engine,

navigating by dead reckoning.

The glens were full of frost and fog. Fog lay in pillows in the folds of the hills; the distant mountaintops shone dazzling pink and white beneath rays of low sunshine that didn't touch the Spitfire's wings. The haar, the North Sea coastal fog, was closing in. It was so cold that the moist air crystallized inside the Plexiglas hood, so that it seemed to be lightly snowing in the cockpit.

Maddie landed at Deeside just before sunset. But it wasn't sunset; it was twilight gray and turning blue, and she would either have to spend the night in a cheerless, unmade spare bed in the guest room of the officers' billet, or she'd have to find a guest house in Aberdeen. Or she'd have to spend half the night on an unheated and blacked-out train and perhaps arrive back in Manchester at two o'clock in the morning. Unwilling to face the loneliness of the airfield's spartan accommodation, or a dour granite-faced Aberdeen landlady who wouldn't accept her ration coupons for an unarranged evening meal, Maddie opted for the train.

She walked to the branch line station at Deeside. There were no route maps posted on the walls, but a Wonderland-style sign commanding, "If you know where you are, then please tell others." There were no lights in the waiting room because they'd show when you opened the door. The ticket seller had a dim banker's lamp burning behind his wee cage.

Maddie straightened herself out a bit. The girls in the ATA had been given a good splash of publicity in the papers and were expected to live up to certain standards of neatness. But she'd found that people didn't always recognize her navy uniform with its gold ATA pilot's wings, or make sense of them, and Scotland was as foreign a land as France to Maddie.

"Is there a train any time soon?" she asked.

"Aye, there is," agreed the ticket seller, as cryptic as the platform posters.

"When?"

"Ten minutes. Aye, ten minutes."

"Going to Aberdeen?"

"Och, no, not to Aberdeen. The next train's the branch line

to Castle Craig.”

To make this easier, I am translating the ticket seller’s speech from Aberdeen Doric. Maddie, not being fluent in the Doric herself, wasn’t sure she’d heard correctly.

“*Craig Castle?*”

“Castle Craig,” this bogle of a railway employee repeated laconically. “Single to Castle Craig, miss?”

“No—no!” Maddie said sensibly, and then in a fit of pure insanity brought on, no doubt, by loneliness and hunger and fatigue, added, “Not a single, I’ve got to come back. A return, please. Third-class return to Castle Craig.”

Half an hour later: Oh, *what* have I done! Maddie thought to herself, as the antique and ice-cold two-coach stopping train lurched and crept past a number of pitch-dark, anonymous station platforms, bearing Maddie farther and farther into the haunted foothills of the Scottish Highlands.

The compartment in the railway carriage was dimly lit by one blue light overhead. The carriage was not heated. There were no other passengers in Maddie’s compartment.

“When’s the next train back?” she asked the ticket collector.

“Last one in two hours.”

“Is there one before that?”

“*Last one* in two hours,” he repeated unhelpfully.

(Some of us still have not forgiven the English for the Battle of Culloden, the last battle to be fought on British soil, in 1746. Imagine what we will say about Adolf Hitler in two hundred years.)

Maddie got off the train at Castle Craig. She had no luggage but her gas mask and her flight bag, containing a skirt that she was supposed to wear when she wasn’t flying but which she hadn’t been able to change into, and her maps and pilot’s notes and circular slide rule for wind speed computations. And a toothbrush and her last flight’s two-ounce bar of chocolate. She remembered how she’d nearly wept with envy at Dymrna’s description of having to spend the night in the back of a Fox Moth and nearly freezing to death. Maddie wondered if she’d

freeze to death before the train she just got off finally went back to Deeside two hours later.

Here I think I should remind you that my family is long-established in rather the upper echelons of the British aristocracy. Maddie, you will recall, is the granddaughter of an immigrant tradesman. She and I would not ever have met in peacetime. Not *ever*, unless perhaps I'd decided to buy a motorbike in Stockport—perhaps Maddie might have served me. But if she hadn't been such a cracking radio operator and been promoted so quickly, it's not likely we'd have become friends even in wartime, because British officers don't mingle with the Lower Ranks.

(I don't believe it for a minute—that we wouldn't have become friends somehow—that an unexploded bomb wouldn't have gone off and blown us both into the same crater, or that God himself wouldn't have come along and knocked our heads together in a flash of green sunlight. But it wouldn't have been *likely*.)

At any rate, Maddie's growing misgivings on this particular ill-conceived rail journey were mostly based on her certainty that she simply *could not* go knock on the door of a Laird's Castle and ask for accommodation, or even a cup of tea while she waited for the return train. She was only Maddie Brodatt and not a descendant of Mary, Queen of Scots, or Macbeth.

But she had not taken the War into account. I have heard a good many people say that it is leveling the British class system. *Leveling* is perhaps too strong a word, but it is certainly mixing us up a bit.

Maddie was the only passenger to get off at Castle Craig, and after she'd dithered on the platform for five minutes, the stationmaster came out to greet her personally.

"You a mate o' young Jamie up the Big House, are ye?"

For a moment Maddie was too surprised to answer.

"He'll be glad o' sensible company, he will, alone in that castle with them young rascals from Glasgow."

"Alone?" Maddie croaked.

"Aye, the Lady's away to Aberdeen for three days with the Women's Voluntary Service, packing socks and cigarettes to

send our lads fighting in the desert. It's young Jamie alone with them evacuees. Eight o' them, the Lady took in, last ones in the queue—no one else would have 'em, the mucky wee lads, wi' their nits an' streamin' noses. Dads all at work on the ships, bombs droppin' night and day, kiddies never been out o' the tenements in their lives. The Lady said she'd raised six weans of her own and five o' them lads, eight o' someone else's lads wouldn't be much different. But she's gone and left young Jamie to make their tea with them puir mangled hands o' his—"

Maddie's heart soared at the idea of helping Jamie make tea for eight Glaswegian evacuees.

"Can I walk there?"

"Aye, half a mile along the main road to the gate, then a mile down the drive."

Maddie thanked him, and he raised his cap to her.

"How'd you know me for a friend of Jamie's?" she asked.

"Yer boots," the stationmaster said. "All you RAF lads wear the same boots. Never seen young Jamie take his off. Wish I had a pair."

Maddie walked through the windy dark to Craig Castle, bubbling over with giddy laughter and relief and anticipation.

I'm an RAF lad! she thought, and laughed aloud in the dark.

Craig Castle is a small castle—I mean, compared to Edinburgh or Stirling Castles; or Balmoral, where the King lives in the summer; or Glamis, where the Queen's family lives. But it is a proper castle, bits of it nearly six hundred years old, with its own well in case of siege, and cellars you can use as dungeons or wine stores, and four different endless spiral stairways so that not all of the rooms on every level actually connect. There is a room lost behind a sealed wall (there is also a window missing on the wall outside, and an extra chimney, so we know the room used to be there). Also, there are gun rooms and trophy rooms, a billiard room and a smoking room, two libraries, innumerable retiring and drawing rooms, etc. At the moment most of these are under dust sheets because everyone is off doing War work, including the staff.

When Maddie arrived, it looked deserted—blackout, of course—but she staunchly rattled the iron ratchet at the main

door and eventually a Very Grubby Glaswegian Evacuee with egg smeared from the left corner of his mouth right across to his left ear opened the door. He was carrying a candle in a tin candlestick.

“Jack-be-nimble,” Maddie said.

“Me name’s *Jock*,” retorted the evacuee.

“Have I interrupted your tea?”

Jock responded in a garble of excited Glaswegian syllables. He might as well have spoken German for all Maddie understood.

He wanted to touch her gold wings. He had to point to them to get her to understand.

She let him.

“Come along through,” he said firmly, beaming, as though she’d passed a test. He shut the massive oak-and-iron door behind them, and Maddie followed him into the labyrinth where I was born.

They emerged in the below-stairs kitchen—with four sinks and three ovens and burners enough to cater meals for fifty guests, and a pine table big enough to seat all the staff if there were any. Around this table were seven young lads—properly young, primary-school age, Jock being the eldest at about twelve—all wearing hobnailed boots and short trousers (to save on cloth) and patched-over school pullovers in varying states of grottness, all their faces smeared with egg, all consuming toast soldiers at an alarming rate. Standing at the great black Victorian stove top, presiding over a bubbling iron cauldron, was the Honorable youngest son of the Laird of Craig Castle—looking every inch the modern Highland hero in a faded kilt of Hunting Stewart tartan, hand-knit woolen kilt hose, and a machine-knit woolen RAF airman’s sweater. His boots exactly matched Maddie’s.

“Three minutes, who’s up?” he announced, upending an extraordinary ormolu-gilt hourglass and displaying a boiled egg with a pair of silver sugar tongs.

His maimed hands, two fingers and thumb remaining on each, were deft and quick. He sniffed the air. “Oi, Tam, you flip that toast before it burns!” he barked, then turned and saw

Maddie.

She wouldn't have recognized him as Jamie—tonight he was the picture of rosy health, nothing like the gray-faced, grieving invalid she'd last seen slumping bandaged and unresponsive in a Bath chair. But she'd never have doubted he was her best friend's brother. Same sleek fair hair, same small light build, same quick bewitching features with a faint hint of lunacy behind the bright eyes.

He saluted her. The effect was incredible. All seven young lads (and Jock) joined him smartly, leaping to their feet and scraping back chairs.

"Second Officer Brodatt of the Air Transport Auxiliary," he introduced her. The boys reeled off their names like a row of cadets: Hamish, Angus, Mungo, Rabbie, Tam, Wullie, Ross, and Jock.

"The Craig Castle Irregulars," Jamie said. "Would you like to join us in a boiled egg, Second Officer Brodatt?"

Maddie's egg allocation amounted to one per week. She usually donated it to her gran for baking, or for the Sunday morning fry-up, and she often had to miss that anyway.

"There's hens all over the grounds," Hamish told her as she sat down with the boys. "We get to eat every egg we find."

"Keeps 'em busy, too, lookin' for 'em," said Jamie.

Maddie took the top off her egg with her spoon. The hot, bright yolk was like a summer sun breaking through cloud, the first daffodil in the snow, a gold sovereign wrapped in a white silk handkerchief. She dipped her spoon in it and licked it.

"You lads," she said slowly, looking around at the grubby faces, "have been evacuated to a magic castle."

"It's true, miss," said Jock, forgetting she was an officer. He gabbled at her in Glaswegian.

"Speak *slowly*," Jamie commanded.

Jock spoke loudly instead. Maddie got the gist of it. "There's a ghost that sits at the top of the tower stairs. You go all cold if you walk through him by accident."

"I've *seen* him," said Angus proudly.

"Aw, ye hav'nae," mocked Wullie with deep scorn. "An' ye

sleep wi' a teddy. There's nae ghostie."

They broke into an incomprehensible argument about the ghost. Jamie sat down across from Maddie and they beamed at each other.

"I feel dead outnumbered," Maddie said.

"Me too," Jamie agreed.

He was more or less living in the kitchen and the smaller of the two libraries. The Craig Castle Irregulars mostly lived outside. They slept three to a bed in our ancestral four-posters. The laddies were happy to crowd in together, as that's what they were used to at home, and it saved on sheets, leaving Ross and Jock to share on their own (Ross being Jock's wee brother). Jamie had them all wash up and brush their teeth military-style (or school-style) at the four kitchen sinks, two boys per sink, very efficient. Then he literally marched them all up to bed, installed Maddie in his fox's den of a library on the way, and came back to her twenty minutes later carrying a steaming silver coffee pot.

"It's real coffee," he said. "From Jamaica. Mother hoards it for special occasions, but it's starting to lose its flavor now." He sank into one of the cracked leather armchairs in front of the fire grate with a sigh. "How did you ever get here, Maddie Brodatt?"

"Second to the right, and then straight on till morning," she answered promptly—it did feel like Neverland.

"Crikey, am I so obviously Peter Pan?"

Maddie laughed. "The Lost Boys give it away."

Jamie studied his hands. "Mother keeps the windows open in all our bedrooms while we're gone, like Mrs. Darling, just in case we come flying home when she's not expecting us." He poured Maddie a cup of coffee. "My window's closed just now. I'm not flying at the minute."

He spoke without bitterness.

Maddie asked a question she'd wanted to ask him when she'd first met him, only she hadn't had the courage.

"How did you ever manage to save your hands?"

“Popped my fingers in my mouth,” Jamie answered readily. “I swapped hands every thirty seconds or so. Couldn’t fit any more than three fingers at a time, and thought I’d better concentrate on the ones I’d miss the most. My big brothers and little sister have all started to call me The Pobble Who Has No Toes, which is a very silly poem by Edward Lear.” He sipped his own coffee. “Having something to concentrate on probably saved more than just my hands. My navigator, who came down with me, just gave up, only about an hour after we’d been in the water. Just let go. Didn’t want to think about it.”

“You going back?”

He hesitated a little, but when he spoke, it was with determination, as though he had a puzzle to solve. “My doctor says they might not want me in a bomber crew. But—you’ve got a chap with one arm flying in the ATA, don’t you? I thought they might take me. Ancient and Tattered Airmen, isn’t that what they call you?”

“Not me,” Maddie said. “I’m one of the Always Terrified Airwomen.”

Jamie laughed. “You, terrified! My eye.”

“I don’t like guns,” Maddie said. “Someday I’ll be fired on in the air, and I’ll go down in flames just because I’m too blooming scared to fly the plane.”

Jamie didn’t laugh.

“Must be awful,” Maddie said quietly. “Have you flown at all—since?”

He shook his head. “I can, though.”

From what she’d seen of him that night, she thought he probably could.

“How many hours have you got?”

“Hundreds,” he said. “Over half of them at night. Mostly on Blenheims—that’s what I was flying all the time I was operational.”

“What did you train on?” Maddie asked.

“Ansons. Lysanders at first.”

He was watching her intently over his coffee, as though she were conducting an interview and he were waiting to hear if

he'd got the job. Of course it was none of her business, and she had no authority. But she'd landed Lysanders herself too many times at that odd RAF Special Duties airfield, you see, even spent a night in the Moon Squadron's private ivy-covered cottage hidden in a small wood at the edge of the normal airfield (there hadn't been any other place to put her, and she'd been very carefully segregated from the other visitors). She had some idea of the difficulties that peculiar squadron had in finding and keeping pilots. Hundreds of hours' night flying required, and fluent French, and though they could only take volunteers, they were such a secret operation that they weren't allowed to actively recruit anyone.

Maddie has a rule about passing on favors, which she calls the Aerodrome Drop-Off Principle. It is very simple. If someone needs to get to an airfield and you can get them there, by taxi Anson or motorbike or pony trap or pig-a-back, you should always take them. Because someday you will need a ride to an airfield too. Someone different will have to take you, so the favor gets passed on instead of paid back.

Now, talking to Jamie, Maddie thought of all the little things Dympna Wythenshawe had done or said on Maddie's behalf, things that had cost Dympna nothing, but had changed Maddie's life. Maddie knew she could never repay Dympna; but now, according to the Aerodrome Drop-Off Principle, Maddie had a chance to pass the life-changing favors on.

"You should ask your C.O. about Special Duties flying," she said to Jamie. "I think you'd have a good chance of getting in with them."

"Special Duties?" Jamie echoed, just as Maddie had echoed Theo Lyons a few months back.

"They fly dead hush-hush missions," Maddie said. "Short field operations, night landings. Lysanders and sometimes Hudsons. It's not a big squadron. Volunteer for RAF Special Duties, and if you need a reference, ask to talk to—"

The name she gave Jamie was the alias of the intelligence officer who recruited me.

It was probably the most daring thing she'd ever done. Maddie could only guess at what he was. But she'd remembered

his name—or rather, the name he'd used when he bought her a whisky in the Green Man—and she'd seen him *more than once* on the secret airfield (and he thought he was so clever, too). Plenty of odd civilians came and went from that airfield, but Maddie didn't see many of them, and when she recognized the one she *did* see, it stuck in her head as a most peculiar coincidence.

(Bloody Machiavellian English Intelligence Officer playing God.)

Jamie repeated the name aloud to fix it in his head, and leaned forward to peer at Maddie more closely in the firelight from the library grate.

"Where the devil have you come by *that* sort of information?"

"Careless talk costs lives," Maddie answered sternly, and The Pobble Who Has No Toes laughed, because it sounded so like his little sister. I mean his younger sister. (I mean me.)

How I would love to stay in the library at Craig Castle with them all night. Later, Maddie slept in my bed (Mother always keeps our beds made up, just in case). It was cold with the window open, but, like Mother and Mrs. Darling, Maddie left the window as she found it, also just in case. I wish I could indulge in writing about my bedroom, but I must stop early today so von Linden can prep me for this radio interview tomorrow. Anyway, my bedroom at home in Craig Castle, Castle Craig, has nothing to do with the War.

This bloody radio interview. All lies, lies, and damned lies.

I'm supposed to use this time to make my own notes on the radio interview yesterday—as a kind of backstop in case the actual broadcast doesn't match up with what v.L. remembers of it. I would have written about it anyway but BUCKETS OF BLOOD, WHEN DO I GET TO FINISH MY GREAT DISSERTATION OF TREASON?

They really made an effort to make me presentable, as though I were a debutante to be presented to the King of England all over again. It was decided (not by me) that my beloved pullover makes me look too thin and pale, and is also getting a wee bit ragged, so they washed and pressed my blouse and temporarily gave me back my gray silk scarf. I was flabbergasted to find they still had it—I suppose it must be part of my file and they are still hunting for unrevealed code in the paisley.

They let me put my hair up but made a lot of fuss over how to fix it, because no one trusts me with hairpins. In the end I was allowed to use PENCIL STUBS. MY GOD they are petty. I was also allowed to do it myself because A) Engel could not make it stay, and B) she could not hide the pencils as well as I did. And even after soaking my fingertips in kerosene for an hour (who suspected kerosene has so many uses?) they have failed to get rid of the ink stains beneath my fingernails. But that just adds credibility to the stenographer story, I think. Also, because afterward my hands positively reeked of kerosene, I was then allowed to scrub myself all over with a lovely creamy little bar of curious American soap that *floats* in the basin when you let go of it. Where in the world did *that* come from? (Apart from the obvious, "America.") It looked like hotel soap but the wrapper was in English and it couldn't have been from this hotel.

C d M, le Château des Mystères

Engel did my nails. I was not let to do them myself lest I

stab someone with the file. She was as vicious as possible without actually drawing blood (she succeeded in making me cry), but otherwise it is a perfect manicure. I feel sure she has fashion sense lurking beneath the Teutonic Mädchen guise she affects for the Gestapo.

They installed me at the marquetry table with some harmless dummy documents to work on—finding the best connections between French rail and bus timetables and making a list of them in German. When they brought in the interviewer I stood up with an artificial smile and crossed the antique Persian carpet to welcome her, feeling exactly as though I were playing the Secretary on the opening night set of Agatha Christie's *Alibi*.

"Georgia Penn," the radio announcer introduced herself, offering me her hand. She is about a foot taller than me and walks with a stick and a prodigious limp. As old as von Linden, big and loud and friendly—well, just *American*. She worked in Spain during the Civil War as a foreign correspondent and got very badly treated by the Republicans, hence her pro-Fascist bent. She is normally based in Paris and does a radio show called "No Place Like Home" full of jive tunes and pie recipes and discouraging hints that if you are stationed on a battleship in the Mediterranean, your girl is probably cheating on you back in the States. This rubbish is broadcast over and over to make the American soldiers homesick. Apparently Yanks will listen to *anything* if it includes decent music. The BBC is too serious for them.

I shook this treacherous woman's hand and said coolly, *en français pour que l'Hauptsturmführer*, who doesn't speak English, *puisse nous comprendre*, "I'm afraid I can't tell you my name."

She glanced over at von Linden, who stood deferentially at her shoulder.

"*Pourquoi?*" she demanded of him. She is even taller than von Linden, and her French has all the same broad twangy American vowels as her English. "Why can't I know her name?"

She looked back down at me from her colossal height. I adjusted my scarf and assumed the casual pose of a saint stuck full of arrows, hands linked loosely behind my back, one foot turned out before the other with the knee slightly bent, my

head cocked to one side.

“It’s for my own protection,” I said. “I don’t want my name publicized.”

What TOSH. I suppose I *could* have said “I am supposed to vanish into the Night and the Fog—” Don’t know what she’d have made of that. I wasn’t even allowed to tell her what branch of the military I am serving with.

Von Linden gave me a chair as well, next to Miss Penn, away from the table where I’d been working. Engel hovered subordonately. Miss Penn offered a cigarette to von Linden, who waved it away in disdain.

“May I?” she said, and when he shrugged politely, she took one herself and offered another to me. Bet Engel wanted one.

I said, “*Merci mille fois.*” He said *nothing*. *O mein Hauptsturmführer! You coward!*

She set about lighting the cigarettes and announced in her brisk, straightforward French, “I don’t want to waste my time listening to propaganda. It’s my job and I’m wise to it. I’ll be frank with you—I’m looking for truth. *Je cherche la vérité.*”

“Your accent is frightful,” I answered, also in French. “Would you repeat that in English?”

She did—taking no insult, very serious, through a pall of smoke.

“I’m looking for verity.”

It’s a bloody good thing von Linden let me have that cigarette, because otherwise I don’t know how I’d have managed to conceal that every one of us was dealing out her own DAMNED PACK OF LIES.

“Truth,” I said at last, in English.

“Truth,” she agreed.

Engel came running to my aid with a saucer (there being no ashtrays). I’d sucked the whole cigarette down to the butt, in five or six long drags, composing myself to answer.

“Verity,” I said in English, and exhaled every last molecule of nicotine and oxygen I had inside me. Then gasped: “Truth is the daughter of time, not authority.” And: “This above all, to thine own self be true.” I gibbered a bit, I confess. “Verity! I am

the soul of verity.” I laughed so wildly, then, that the Hauptsturmführer had to clear his throat to remind me to control myself. “I am the soul of verity,” I repeated. “*Je suis l’esprit de vérité.*”

In amongst the tobacco fug, Georgia Penn very kindly handed me what was left of her own cigarette.

“Well, thank goodness for that,” she said in a motherly tone. “So I can trust you to give me honest answers—” She glanced up at von Linden. “You know what they call this place?”

I raised my eyebrows, shrugging.

“*Le Château des Bourreaux*,” she said.

I laughed rather too loudly again, crossed my legs, and examined the inside of my wrist.

(It is a pun, you see—*Château de Bordeaux*, *Château des Bourreaux*—Bordeaux Castle, Castle of Butchers.)

“No, I’d not heard that,” I said. And I honestly haven’t—perhaps because I am so isolated most of the time. Shows you how distracted I am that I didn’t think of it myself. “Well, as you can see I am still in one piece.”

She really looked at me hard for a second—just one second. I smoothed my skirt down over my knee. Then she became businesslike and produced a notebook and pen while a pale Gestapo underling who looked about twelve years old poured cognac (COGNAC!) for the three of us (the THREE of us—v.L., G.P., and ME—not Engel) out of a crystal decanter into snifters as big as my head.

At this point I became so deeply suspicious of everyone in the room that I could not remember what I was supposed to say. *Alibi, Alibi*, is all I could think of. This is different, I don’t know what’s going on, he wants to catch me off guard, it’s a new trick. Is the room bugged, why have they lit the fire and not the chandelier, and what does the talking cockatoo have to do with it?

Wait, wait, wait! What else is there to get out of me? I’m GIVING THE GESTAPO EVERYTHING I KNOW. I’ve been doing it for weeks. Pull yourself together, lassie, you’re a Wallace and a Stuart!

At *this* point, I purposefully put out my cigarette against my own palm. Nobody noticed.

To hell with the truth, I told myself fiercely. *I want another week.* I want my week and I'm going to get it.

I asked if we could speak in English for the interview; it felt more natural to talk to the American in English, and with Engel there to translate, the Hauptsturmführer did not mind. So then it was up to me, really, to put on a good show.

He did not want me to tell her about the codes I'd given him—certainly not about the, ah, *stressful* circumstances under which I'd collapsed and coughed them up—nor that the eleven wireless sets in Maddie's Lysander were all destroyed in the fire when she crashed. (They showed me those pictures during my interrogation. The enlargements from the pilot's cockpit came later. I think I mentioned them here but I am not going to describe them.) I don't entirely follow the logic of what I could or couldn't tell the American broadcaster, since if she cared to she could have easily found out from anyone in Ormaie about those destroyed radio sets, but perhaps no one has told British Intelligence yet, and the Gestapo is still playing the radio game—*das Funkspiel*—trying to play back my compromised codes and frequencies on one of their previously captured wireless sets.

(I suppose I *should* have written about those pictures, only I couldn't—literally couldn't—it was during those days when I had run out of paper. But I won't now either.)

I said I was a wireless operator, parachuted here in civilian clothes so I might not attract attention, and that I had been caught because I made a cultural blunder—we chatted a bit about the difficulty of being a foreigner and trying to assimilate yourself into French daily life. Engel nodded sagely in agreement, not while she was listening to me, but as she was repeating it to von Linden.

Oh, how strange this war is, mirabile dictu—the wee Scots wireless set, I mean operator, is still nursing small, hidden, nasty short circuits got during her savagely inhuman interrogation—yet she can keep a straight face as she sits beneath the Venetian chandelier with the American Penn and the Germans Engel and von Linden, sharing cognac and complaining about the French!

It made the right impression, though—finding something we all agreed on.

Penn then remarked that Engel's English must have been picked up in the American Midwest, which left the rest of us speechless for a longish moment. Then Engel confessed that she had been a student at the university of Chicago for a year (where she was training as a CHEMIST. I don't think I've ever met ANYONE with so much wasted talent). Penn tried to make her play the Do-You-Know game, but the only person they had in common was Henry Ford, whom Engel had met at a charity dinner. Engel's American contacts were all very respectably pro-Germany, Penn's less so. They were not in Chicago at the same time—Penn has been based in Europe since the early '30s.

Fräulein Anna Engel, M d M—Mädchen des Mystères

We looked at my translated bus schedule and admired v.L.'s Montblanc fountain pen, which I had been using. Penn asked me if I was worried about my upcoming "trial."

"It's a formality." I could not help being brutal about this. "I will be shot." She asked for honesty, after all. "I am a military emissary caught in enemy territory masquerading as a civilian. I count as a spy. The Geneva Convention doesn't protect me."

She was silent for a moment.

"There's a war on," I added, to remind her.

"Yes." She scribbled some notes on her pad. "Well. You're very brave."

All TOSH!

"Can you speak on behalf of other prisoners here?"

"We don't see much of each other." Had to dodge that one. "Or, not to speak to." I do see them, too often. "Will you get a tour?"

She nodded. "It looks very nice. Clean linen in all the rooms. A bit spartan."

"Well-heated, too," I said waspishly. "It used to be a hotel. No proper dungeon rooms, no damp, no one suffering arthritis at all."

They must have taken her 'round the rooms they use for the orderlies—perhaps even planted a few as dummy prisoners.

The Gestapo use the ground floor and two mezzanines for their own accommodation and offices, and it is all kept in beautiful condition. The real prisoners are kept on the uppermost three stories. It is harder to escape when you are at least forty feet above the ground.

Penn seemed satisfied. She heaved a tight smile in von Linden's direction and said, "*Ich danke Ihnen*—I thank you," very grave and formal, then continued in French to tell him how grateful she was for this unique and unusual opportunity. I suppose she'll interview him too, separate from me.

Then she leaned close to me and said in confidential tones, "Can I get you anything? Send you anything—little things? Towels?"

I told her I'd stopped.

Well—I have—and they wouldn't let her anyway. Would they? I don't know. According to the Geneva Convention you're allowed to send useful things to prisoners of war—cigarettes, toothbrushes, fruitcakes with hacksaws inside. But as I'd just pointed out, the Geneva Convention doesn't apply to me. *Nacht und Nebel*, *night and fog*. Brrr. As far as Georgia Penn knows, I have no name. To whom would she address the package?

She asked, "You're not—?"

It was a rather extraordinary conversation if you think about it—both of us speaking in code. But not military code, not Intelligence or Resistance code—just feminine code.

"You haven't been—?"

I'm sure Engel was able to fill in the blanks:

—Can I send you (sanitary) towels?

—No thanks, I've stopped (bleeding).

—You're not (pregnant)? You haven't been (raped)?

Raped. What was she going to do about it if I had?

Anyway, technically speaking, I've not been raped.

No, I've just stopped.

I've not had a cycle since I left England. I think my body simply shut itself down during those first three weeks. It performs basic functions only now. It knows perfectly well it's

never going to be called on for reproductive purposes. I'm a wireless set.

Penn shrugged, nodding, with her mouth twisting skeptically and her eyebrows raised. Her mannerisms are what you'd imagine in a pioneering farmer's wife. "Well, you don't look so healthy," she said to me.

I look like I've just emerged from a sanatorium and am about to lose a long battle with consumption. Starvation and sleep deprivation do leave visible marks, YOU IDIOTS.

"I haven't seen the sun for six weeks," I said. "But sometimes the weather's like that back home, too."

"Well, it's sure nice," she drawled. "It's nice to see they're treating prisoners so well here."

Suddenly, in one great dollop, she sloshed all her cognac—untouched, the entire glass—into my glass.

I slugged the whole lot down like a sailor before anyone could take it away from me, and spent the rest of the afternoon being sick.

Do you know what he did last night—von Linden, I mean. Came and stood in the doorway of my cell after he'd finished work and asked me if I've read Goethe. He has been chewing over this idea that I can "buy" time in exchange for bits of my soul, and he wondered if I likened myself to Faust. Nothing like an arcane literary debate with your tyrannical master while you pass the time leading to your execution.

When he left I said to him, "*Je vous souhaite une bonne nuit*"—"I wish you a good night"—not because I wished him a good night but because that is what the German officer says to his unyielding passive-resistant French hosts every night in *Le Silence de la Mer*—that tract of Gallic defiance and the literary spirit of the French Resistance. A copy was given me by a Frenchwoman I trained with, just after she was brought back from the field late last year. I thought that von Linden might have read it too, as he is such a Know Your Enemy type (also he is very well-read). But he didn't seem to recognize the quotation.

Engel has told me what he did before the War. He was rector of a rather posh boys' school in Berlin.

A headmaster!

Also, he has a daughter.

She is safe at school in Switzerland, neutral Switzerland, where no Allied bombers raid the skies at night. I can safely assert she doesn't go to *my* school. My school shut down just before the War began, when most of the English and French pupils were pulled out, which is why I went off to university a bit early.

Von Linden has a daughter only a little younger than me. I see now why he takes such a clinically distant approach to his work.

Still not sure whether he has a soul, though. Any Jerry bastard with his wedding tackle intact can beget a daughter. And there are a lot of sadistic head teachers about.

Oh my God, why do I do it—again and again? I HAVE THE BRAIN OF A PTARMIGAN HEN. HE WILL SEE ANYTHING I WRITE.

Engel, bless her, skipped over the last few paragraphs I wrote yesterday when she was translating for von Linden last night. I think it was self-preservation on her part rather than any good nature toward me. Someone will eventually discover what a chatterbox she is, but she's growing wise to my efforts to get her in trouble. (She pointed out to von Linden some time ago that I know perfectly well how to do metric conversions and only pretend ignorance to torment her. But it is true that she is better at them than I am.)

In addition to my extra week, I've now been given a fresh supply of paper. Sheet music, surely also the ill-gotten spoils of the Château des Bourreaux—a lot of popular songs from the last decade and some pieces by French composers, scored for flute and piano. The verso of the flute parts are all blank so I have paper in abundance again. I was getting a bit weary of those flipping recipe cards. We are still using them for the other work.

WARTIME ADMINISTRATIVE FORMALITIES

I am condensing now. I can't write fast enough.

Maddie was being groomed by the SOE long before she became aware of it. About the same time Jamie started flying again somewhere in the south of England, back in Manchester, Maddie was put on a course to do night flying. She leaped at the chance. She was so used to being the only girl around, there being no more than two other women in the Manchester ATA ferry pool, that it did not occur to her there was anything unusual going on.

Everyone else on the course was a bomber pilot or navigator. The ferry pilots don't fly at night, in general. In fact *Maddie* didn't fly at night for a while after she'd clocked the

hours and had her logbook stamped, and she had a difficult time keeping in practice because she used it so little. Since 1940 we have not come off daylight-saving at all, and in summer it is double, which means for a whole month it doesn't get dark till nearly midnight. Maddie couldn't have used her night flying anyway in the summer of 1942 unless she'd gone up in the middle of the night, so she didn't wonder about it. She was busy—thirteen days on ferrying and two off, in all kinds of weather, and there were so many ongoing senseless administrative formalities or blunders that a bit of pointless night training was unremarkable.

They gave her parachute training too—an equally random and apparently useless skill. Maddie was trained not as an actual *paratrooper*, but she learned to fly the plane while people were jumping. They use Whitley bombers for the parachute training, a type Maddie hadn't flown before, and they flew from her home airfield—nothing about it seemed strange until she was asked to come along as Pilot 2 when I was making my first jump from a plane over the low hills of Cheshire (at this point I had no choice but to cross “Heights” off my list of fears). Maddie certainly hadn't expected *me* and was too sharp to take it as a coincidence. She recognized me instantly as we climbed on board—despite my hair being uncharacteristically tied back with a ribbon like a pony club competitor (otherwise it wouldn't have fit inside those ducky wee helmets that make you look as though you have stuck your head in a Christmas cake). Maddie knew better than to register surprise or recognition. She'd been told who this group was—or who they *weren't*, anyway—six of them, two of them women, jumping from a plane for the first time.

We weren't allowed to talk to the pilots, either. I made three jumps that week—the women do one less training jump than the men, AND they make us jump first. I don't know if that's because we're considered cannier than men, or braver, or bouncier, or just less likely to survive and therefore aren't worth the extra petrol and parachute packing. At any rate, Maddie saw me twice in the air and never got to say hello.

I got to watch her fly, though.

You know, I envied her. I envied her the simplicity of her

work, the spiritual cleanness of it—*Fly the plane, Maddie*. That was all she had to do. There was no guilt, no moral dilemma, no argument or anguish—danger, yes, but she always knew what she was facing. And I envied that she had chosen her work herself and was doing what she wanted to do. I don't suppose I had any idea what I "wanted" and so I was *chosen*, not choosing. There's glory and honor in being *chosen*. But not much room for free will.

Thirteen days' flying and two days off. Never knowing where she'd get her next meal or spend the night. No social life to speak of—but moments, now and then, unexpected and unlooked for, of solitary joy—alone in the sky in the cruise, straight and level at 4000 feet over the Cheviots or the Fens or the Marches, or dipping her wings in salute to a passing vic of Spitfires.

With a pilot assistant as her copilot (she was his senior by a hundred hours' flight time) she delivered a Hudson to RAF Special Duties. You have to take a pilot assistant with you when you ferry a Hudson. The Moon Squadron use them for nighttime parachute drops, the Hudsons being bigger than the Lizzies, not so suitable for short field landings.

They sometimes land them if they have a lot of passengers to pick up. Maddie had flown a few other twin-engined bombers before (like the Whitley), but not a Hudson, and she slammed the tail a bit when she landed. Afterward she spent a long time examining the tailwheel looking for prangs with three of the local ground crew (who decided there was nothing wrong with it). When she and her copilot finally went into Operations to get their ferry chits signed, the radio chap told Maddie politely, "You're to step into the debriefing room in The Cottage for a few minutes, if you don't mind. They're sending a driver. Your second pilot had better wait here."

That was because The Cottage is fairly out-of-bounds, even to people landing at the big airfield on legitimate business. But, of course, Maddie herself had been there before.

She swallowed an anguished sigh. Court-martial? No, it was just a heavy landing; her copilot had supported her loyally when they were talking about it with the ground crew, and the Air Ministry would *laugh* if she tried to file an accident report.

She'd be court-martialed for wasting their time. Oh—she thought—what have I done *now*?

The smart and charming First Aid Nursing Yeomanry girl who does the driving for the Moon Squadron didn't ask Maddie any questions. She is trained not to ask her passengers any questions.

No room in The Cottage is so severe and forbidding as the debriefing room (I do know). It was formerly a laundry (about two hundred years ago), I think, all limewashed stone walls and a big drain in the middle of the floor, and only an electric heater to heat it. Waiting in this tiger's lair for Maddie was our dear friend the English intelligence officer with the pseudonym. I suppose you may want to dig his pseudonym out of me, but it's rather pointless—could be anything now.

He wasn't using it anymore when he interviewed Jamie early in 1942, and he certainly wasn't using it when he cornered Maddie in the laundry.

The spectacles are unmistakable, and Maddie recognized him right away and was so immediately suspicious she didn't step through the door. He was leaning casually against the shabby pine desk, which is all the permanent furniture in that room, flexing his bony hands in front of the electric heater.

"Second Officer Brodatt!"

The man is charming.

"Beastly rotten to surprise you like this. But one isn't able to arrange such meetings ahead of time, you know."

Maddie's eyes widened. She felt like Red Riding Hood staring at the wolf in Grandma's bed. *What big eyes you have!*

"Come in," he invited. "Do sit down." There was a chair—there were two chairs—pulled up in front of the heater. Maddie could see that it was all set up as informally and cozily as it was possible to make this bleak little room. She swallowed again and sat down, and found the presence of mind to say something at last.

"Am I in trouble?"

He did not laugh. He sat down next to her, leaning over his knees with concern drawing a line down his forehead. He said sharply, "No. No, not at all. I've a job for you."

Maddie recoiled.

“Only if you’re willing.”

“I’m not—” She took a deep breath. “I can’t do that kind of work.”

This time he did laugh, a brief and quiet sympathetic chuckle. “Yes you can. It’s air taxi work. No intrigue attached.”

She stared at him with tight-lipped skepticism.

“It doesn’t mean anything will change for you,” he said.

“No special missions to the Continent.”

Maddie gave him the ghost of a smile.

“You’ll have to do some night landings, and you’ll have to be available as needed. There won’t be any advance notification for these flights.”

“What are they *for*?” Maddie asked.

“Some of our people need fast and efficient private transport—travel when and as needed, there and back in one night, no messing about with petrol rationing or limited speed on country lanes or awkward railway schedules. No risk of being recognized on a station platform or through the window of a motorcar at traffic lights. Does that make sense?”

Maddie nodded.

“You’re a consistent pilot, a superb navigator, sharp as a tack and exceptionally discreet. There are plenty of men and several women better qualified than you, but none, I think, as appropriately suited for this particular taxi service. You remembered my name. You’re well aware of our work here and you keep quiet about it, except when you send us a recruit. If you take the assignments, they’ll be given in the most straightforward manner through your ATA ferry pool. ‘S’ chits, secret, with a report required. You won’t be told anything about the men and women you’ll be taxiing. You’ll already know most of the airfields.”

He is really very hard to resist. Or perhaps Maddie just couldn’t ever pass up a flying opportunity.

“I’ll do it,” she said decisively. “I’ll do it.”

“Tell your assistant pilot you left your clothing ration coupons here on your last flight, and we’ve kept them for you

—”

He thumbed through a file folder, held something up at arm's length, then put it back with a sigh and pushed his heavy spectacles back up his nose. “Getting old,” he apologized. “The middle distance is going now too! Here we are.”

He pored over the pages again and *produced Maddie's clothing ration coupons*. Her stomach turned over. She never found out how he got them.

He handed them to her. “Explain to your colleague you were called in here today so we could return these and give you a lecture about taking greater care with your personal papers.”

“Well, I jolly well will be more careful with them after this,” she told him fiercely.

God what a mess. I have to stop here until I stop crying or it will all be illegibly smeared

sorry sorry sorry

ATA “S” CHITS (SECRET)

At first it was much as he’d said—very little in Maddie’s life changed. For six weeks she heard nothing. Then twice in a week there were chits marked “S” and bearing her own special code name—just an alert to let her know she was “operational,” as it were. But the only way the job really differed from a normal taxi run was that the chaps she picked up obviously weren’t pilots.

After that there were special flights that came regularly, but not frequently. Every six weeks or so. They were all prosaically dull. For taxi work Maddie was put back to flying small training and ex-civil aircraft, open cockpit Tiger Moths and a Puss Moth or two. Apart from the occasional night landing, there wasn’t much to the actual flying that Maddie found challenging.

There was one Lysander flight that was memorable because her passenger traveled with two guards. There is an armored bulkhead that separates the Lysander pilot from her passengers—you can send her notes or coffee or kisses through an opening the size of a page, which she is able to shut against you if she wants so that you cannot shoot her. Not that shooting your pilot would get you anywhere fast, except down, in a Lysander, as you would not be able to take over the controls.

Maddie was safely separated from her would-be assassin, if he was an assassin. She was never afterward sure whether that passenger had traveled as a prisoner under guard or a liability under protection. At any rate, they must have been very crowded with three grown men in the back of the Lysander.

Then, at last, there was me.

Maddie was interrupted in the middle of a bedtime cocoa, very cozy, at home with her gran and granddad in their house

in Stockport. Her Operations officer rang and asked her to make a flight to another airfield that night, collect someone and deliver that someone elsewhere, all to be done ASAP. She'd be told where to go when she got to Oakway, but not over the telephone.

It was September a year ago, a gorgeous, glorious, clear and windless night, some of the best flying weather Maddie had ever known. She scarcely had to fly the little Puss Moth, merely to point it southward along the darkling hills. A great big wonderful waxing bomber's moon was rising as she arrived at the pickup airfield, and Maddie landed just before the local squadron took off. She taxied to the Operations hut as the brand-new Lancasters were leaving. The demure Puss Moth shuddered in the wind of their passing, like a marsh hen among a flock of gray herons—each thrice her wingspan, each with four times as many engines, heavy with the night's fuel and payload of explosive, off to deliver vengeful destruction to Essen's factories and railway yards. Maddie taxied her little plane to the apron in front of the Operations hut and idled the engine, waiting. She'd been told not to shut down.

The Lancasters roared past. Maddie watched with her nose pressed to the windscreen and for a second didn't notice the passenger door being opened. Ground crew, caps pulled low and faces hidden in the wing's shadow, helped the passenger in and fastened her harness. There was no baggage apart from the indispensable gas mask in its haversack, and as usual Maddie wasn't told her special passenger's name. She saw the silhouette of a peaked WAAF cap and could sense that the passenger was hugely keyed up, taut with excitement, but it never occurred to Maddie that she might know this person. Like the SOE drivers, she had been instructed not to ask questions. Over the purr of the engine she shouted emergency exit instructions and the location of the first aid kit.

Once airborne, Maddie didn't initiate conversation—she never did with special passengers. Nor did she point out how splendid the black and occasionally silver landscape was below them in the moonlight, because she knew that part of the reason this person was being flown to her destination at night was so she couldn't guess where she was going. There was a gasp from

the passenger when Maddie, all business, unclipped the Verey pistol from the side of her seat. "Don't worry," she shouted. "It's only a flare gun! I haven't got a radio. The flare lets them know we're here, if they don't hear us buzzing them and put the lights on for us."

But Maddie didn't need to let off her firework display because, after circling for a minute or two, the runway lights blazed up, and Maddie put her own landing light on.

It was a very clean landing. But not until the aircraft had come to a full stop and the engine shut down did the passenger startle Maddie by leaning over and giving her a quick kiss on the cheek.

"Thank you. You are wonderful!"

The ground crew had already opened the passenger's door.

"You should have told me it was you!" Maddie cried, as her friend gathered herself to disappear into the night.

"I didn't like to surprise you in the air!" Queenie automatically checked that her hair was still in place, and with one of her gazellelike leaps, vaulted from the plane onto the concrete. "I'm not used to flying and I've never had to go anywhere at night. Sorry!"

She leaned back into the cockpit for a moment—Maddie could see several figures beckoning and conferring behind her. It was nearly two a.m.

"Wish me luck," Queenie begged. "It's my first assignment."

"Good luck!"

"I'll see you when I'm done. You're to take me home."

Queenie vanished across the concrete, surrounded by attendants.

Maddie was given her own little guest room in the increasingly familiar Cottage. It was odd not knowing what was going on. After a while she dozed off, and was almost instantly woken by that night's operational Lysanders returning from France with their booty of shot-down American airmen, hunted French ministers, a crate of champagne, and sixteen bottles of Chanel No. 5.

Maddie would not have known about the perfume except

that everybody was extraordinarily punchy the next morning, perhaps due to the champagne breakfast (Maddie, being scheduled to take off again after daybreak, prudently didn't take any champagne). Queenie was smug as a cat and glowing with success. She looked as though she'd just won herself a gold medal at the Olympic Games. The squadron leader gave a bottle of French scent to every woman who happened to be on the airfield, including the Land Girl who turned up on her bicycle with a basket of three dozen unallocated eggs and six pints of milk for the Welcome-to-Freedom breakfast.

Freedom, oh, freedom. Even with the shortages, and the blackout, and the bombs, and the rules, and daily life so drab and dull most of the time—once you cross the English Channel you are free. How simple, and amazing really, that no one in France lives without fear, without suspicion. I don't mean the straightforward fear of fiery death. I mean the insidious, demoralizing fear of betrayal, of treachery, of cruelty, of being silenced. Of not being able to trust your neighbor or the girl who brings you eggs. Only twenty-one miles from Dover. Which would you rather have—an unlimited supply of Chanel No. 5, or freedom?

Stupid question, really.

I have reached the point in this account where, unavoidably, I am going to have to talk about myself *before* Ormaie. And I don't want to.

I just want to go on flying and flying in the moonlight. I dreamed I was flying with Maddie, in the five minutes or however short a time it was when there was a lull next door and I actually fell asleep. In my dream the moon was full but it was green, bright green—I kept thinking, *We're in the limelight!* But of course limelight is white, not green—chemical lime, not citrus. This was like the light in Chartreuse liqueur, like the green flash, and I kept wondering, How did I escape? I couldn't remember how I got out of Ormaie. But it didn't matter; I was on my way home in Maddie's Puss Moth, I was safe and Maddie was alongside me flying confidently, and the sky was quiet and full of the beautiful green moon.

God, I'm tired. I truly shot myself in the foot again and am now being forced to regret it. I have been put back to work till

whenever they run out of people to keep an eye on me. Can't decide if this is good news or bad, as I don't mind the infinite supply of paper, but I also forfeited my cabbage soup tonight and I didn't sleep much the past couple of nights, either. (I do wish they'd GIVE UP on that wretched French girl. She is *never* going to tell them *anything*.)

What happened was that when they brought me in this morning, poor Fräulein Engel was sitting at the table with her back to the door, busily numbering my countless recipe cards, and I frightened the living daylights out of her by braying in a deep, stentorian voice of command and discipline, "*Achtung, Anna Engel! Heil Hitler!*" She catapulted to her feet and threw herself into a salute that must have nearly dislocated her shoulder. I've never seen her look so white around the gills. She recovered almost immediately and smacked me so hard she knocked me over. When Thibaut picked me up she smacked me again just for the sheer hell of it. Wow wow wow is my jaw sore. I suppose they are not planning another phony interview.

I can never decide if it is worth it. It was a truly hilarious moment, but all I seem to have achieved this time is a totally unexpected collusion between Engel and Thibaut.

Did I call them Laurel and Hardy? I meant sodding Romeo and Juliet. This is flirting, à la Gestapo underlings:

She: Oh, you are so strong and manly, M'sieur Thibaut. Those knots you tie are so secure.

He: That is nothing. Look, I pull them so tight you cannot undo them. Try.

She: It is true, I cannot! Oh, pull them tighter!

He: *Chérie*, your wish is my command.

It is my ankles, not hers, which he is binding so tightly and with such masculine charm.

She: I shall have to call you in tomorrow morning, as well, to do this task for me.

He: You must cross the cords, so, and knot them behind—

Me: *Squeak! Squeak!*

She: Shut up and write, ya wee skrikin' Scots piece o' shite.

Well, no, she did not use those exact words. But you get the

idea.

Something is up. They have stepped up the pace a bit—not just with me. They are *relentless* with the Resistance prisoners. An inspection due, perhaps? A visit from von Linden’s mysterious boss, the dreaded SS-Sturmbannführer Ferber? (I picture Horns and a Forked Tail.) Perhaps he’s making an inquiry into von Linden’s work here; that would explain why v.L.’s got to get those notes of his in order. Trying to make himself look good.

Desperately trying to marshal my own thoughts in narrative order. I am very tired and (shall I be melodramatic about it?) rather “faint with hunger”—in fact I don’t know if it’s hunger I am faint with, but I *am* very hungry and feeling quite light-headed (I have not been allowed any more aspirin since the episode with the cognac). Perhaps Engel has given me a concussion. I am going to make some lists to try to get through the next bit.

Flights with Maddie

	<i>Date</i>	<i>Departure</i>	<i>Destination</i>	<i>Return</i>
(night)	Sept. '42	Buscot Aerodrome, Oxford	? Special Duties	Buscot (next day)
	Sept.	Buscot	Branston	Buscot
	Oct.	Buscot	? (northeast)	Newcastle then by train to Oxford
	Oct.	"	Ipswich	train to Oxford
	Nov. '42	"	? (northeast)	same
(night)	Jan. '43	"	? (S.D.)	Buscot
	Jan.	Oakway	Glasgow	Newcastle then train to Manchester
	Jan.	Oakway	Glasgow	train to Oxford

The weather at Glasgow was so dreadful that day that no one would take off and everyone was stuck there. I took the

train back, but Maddie had to wait for a gap in the clouds. And sodding Glasgow *still* wasn't finished with me, so I had to go back in

	Feb. '43	Oakway	Glasgow	Who cares?
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Mar.—5 flights, various, all in southern England, 2 at night
April—
Oh—

RAF SPECIAL DUTIES, OPERATIONAL CROSS-COUNTRY

I did take the train to assignments, too, more often than I flew. And Maddie taxied other people besides me, who in all likelihood were not doing the same work as me. But those flights I've just listed are the flights that *count*. Fifteen flights in six months. Maddie took the secrecy more seriously than I did—I was never sure how much she guessed. (Turns out, not much. She just genuinely took it seriously. After all, she started as a Clerk/Special Duties.)

On that night last April we had to go back to That Airfield, the secret one, the one the Moon Squadron uses for France. Jamie was stationed there now. Maddie was In the Know with them, and had been for some time—trusted, accepted, invited to supper that night, in fact. No supper for poor Queenie, though, who was instantly whisked away by the usual mob (really my reception committee only consisted of about three people, including my admirer, the RAF police sergeant who doubles as Security Guard and Chief Sausage Fryer for The Cottage, but it feels like a mob when everyone is bigger than you and you don't know where you are being taken). Queenie had a small traveling case, which she left with Maddie, and from experience Maddie knew she wouldn't see her friend again until at least the next morning. Maddie went to supper with the pilots.

It wasn't something she did often, you know—once in a season, perhaps—and it was special because Jamie was there. In fact he was about to go on a drop-off and pickup mission that

night, a “double Lysander operation,” as they called it, two pilots flying two planes to the same field. There was a third plane taking off with them, taking advantage of the moon, but not technically operational—a new squadron member doing his first cross-country training flight to France. He’d part company with the others over the Channel. He’d fly into France on his own for a bit, then turn back without landing.

This young fellow—let’s call him Michael (after the youngest of the Darling children in *Peter Pan*!)—was quite nervous about his navigation skills. Like Jamie, he’d previously been a bomber pilot and had always had a navigator sitting next to him telling him where to go, and also he’d only flown his first Lysander a month ago. His mates were full of sympathy, having all been through it themselves. Maddie was not.

“You’ve been practicing on Lizzies for a *month*!” she said scornfully. “Crumbs, how long does it *take*? The instruments are the same whether you’re flying a Barracuda dive-bomber or a clapped-out old Tiger Moth, and the flaps are automatic! Easy peasy!”

They all gave her Looks.

“You go on and fly to France, then,” said Michael.

“I would if you’d let me,” she said enviously (not remembering about anti-aircraft guns and night fighters).

“Ah ken what t’ dooo,” drawled Jamie, the Pobble Who Has No Toes, dragging out his vowels to make them exaggeratedly Scots. “Tak’ the wee lassie along.”

Maddie felt as though she’d been struck by lightning. She looked up at him and saw the familiar, faint lunacy shining in Jamie’s eyes. She knew better than to say anything herself—either the Pobble would win on her behalf, or she couldn’t go.

The others laughed and argued briefly. The English SOE agent who was being dropped off that night was disapproving. The Moon Squadron pilots, of necessity a bunch of giddy lunatics, put it to their leader as a proposition. He was clearly torn, but chiefly because Michael was supposed to be solo that night.

“She won’t be helping him fly the plane in the back of a Lysander, will she!”

“She could tell him what to do. Keep him straight if he goes off course.”

Jamie pushed his empty plate away and leaned back in his chair, his hands behind his head, and gave a low whistle.

“Ooo-ee! Arrre you suggestin’ she’s a superior pilot to oorrr Michael?”

They all gazed at Maddie, sitting quietly in her civilian uniform, looking very trim and official with her gold wings and gold stripes (she was a First Officer by now). The only person whose eyes she dared to meet were those of the agent who was going to be dropped off that night. He was shaking his head in defeated disapproval as much as to say, *If you must, my lips are sealed.*

“I’ve no doubt she’s a superior pilot,” the squadron leader said.

“Well, what in creation is she doing ferrying clapped-out Tiger Moths about, in that case? Give the Bloody Machiavellian English Intelligence Officer a call and get permission,” Jamie suggested.

Michael suggested, rather excitedly, “Don’t count it as my operational cross-country. I need the practice.”

“If it’s not an operational flight,” said the squadron leader, “there’s no need to ring Intelligence. I’ll take responsibility.”

Maddie had won. She could scarcely believe her luck.

“I don’t want this out of this *room*,” the squadron leader said, and everybody looked blank, shrugging with innocence and indifference. Maddie walked shoulder to shoulder with the SOE agent when they went out to climb into the waiting aircraft. The ground crew gave her funny looks.

“Michael needing help with his navigation again?” one of them asked kindly, offering her a leg up the ladder into the back of the plane.

Secretly Maddie thought Michael was lucky as a boy with jam smeared all over his face, with his carefully annotated map marked with every single anti-aircraft gun and navigation pinpoint all the way into the middle of France and back.

She didn’t have her own map, sitting in the back, but she

had an absolutely fabulous view out both sides and behind, a view she didn't normally get, and the leisure to enjoy it. She had a job, too, keeping her eyes peeled for night fighters. It wasn't far over the blacked-out villages of southern England before they reached the coast. The great golden moon made the blue lights on the wingtips of the operational Lysanders ahead of them scarcely distinguishable from stars—they bobbed and winked in and out of Maddie's line of sight, but she knew where she was. That river, that chalk quarry, that estuary in the glimmering night—familiar landmarks. Then the unbelievable bright loveliness of the English Channel, a shimmering infinite lamé cloth of silver and blue. Maddie could see the black silhouettes of a convoy of ships below her. She wondered how long it would take the Luftwaffe to find them.

“Oi, Michael,” Maddie called out over the intercom. “You're not meant to follow that lot into France! You're supposed to change your heading here, and go farther south on your own, aren't you?”

She heard a lot of cursing from the front before the pilot pulled himself together and reset his course. Then she heard his sheepish “Thanks, mate.”

Thanks, mate. Maddie hugged herself with pride and pleasure. *I'm one of them*, she thought. I'm on my way to France. I might as well be *operational*.

Deep in her stomach she nursed two cringing, niggling fears: 1) that they might be fired on, and 2) court-martial. But she knew Michael's route had been carefully plotted to avoid guns and airfields, and that their most dangerous moment had probably been when they crossed the shipping convoy. If they made it home safely, there would be no need for court-martial. If they *didn't* make it home safely, well, presumably court-martial wouldn't be much of a problem in that case either.

Now they were over the ghostly white cliffs of eastern Normandy. The Seine's loops shone like a great unwinding spool of silver mesh off the port wingtip. Maddie gasped at the river's inadvertent loveliness, and all at once she found herself spilling childish tears, not just for her own besieged island, but for all of Europe. How could everything have come so fearfully and thoroughly unraveled?

There were no lights over France; it was as blacked out as Britain. Europe's lamps had all gone out.

"What's that!" she gasped into the intercom.

Michael saw it at the same time and banked sharply away. He began to circle, a hair too steeply at first, then with steadier rudder control. Below and ahead of them, lit up like a ghastly funfair, was a rectangle of stark, garish white light desecrating an otherwise blacked-out landscape.

"That's where the last pinpoint is supposed to be!" Michael told her.

"Some pinpoint! Is it an airfield? It's jolly well operational, if it is!"

"No," said the pilot slowly, as he circled back and got another look. "No, I think it's a prison camp. Look—the lighting's around the perimeter fence. To catch anyone trying to get out."

"Are you in the right place?" Maddie asked dubiously.

"You tell me." But he said it with confidence. He stuffed his waymarked map back through the opening in the bulkhead, followed by a pocket-size electric torch. "Keep that under cover," he said. "There's supposed to be an airfield twenty miles to the east. I've been trying to steer clear of it. I damn well don't need an escort."

Maddie studied the map beneath a tent she made of her tunic. Michael was smartly on target as far as she could tell. The glaring prison fence was close to a railway bridge over a river, which should have been the turning-back point. Maddie switched off the torch and stared out the window, her night vision ruined by trying to read the map. But she could tell they had turned back.

"You didn't need my help after all," she said, and passed him back his torch and map.

"I'd have just played follow-my-leader after Jamie all the way to Paris if you hadn't reminded me to turn."

"He's not going to Paris, is he?"

Michael said enviously, "He won't get to buzz the Eiffel Tower, but he's picking up a couple of Parisian agents. He'll

have to land well outside the city.” Then Michael added in a more sober voice, “I’m still jolly glad you came along. That prison gave me a turn. I was so sure I was in the right place, and then—”

“You were,” said Maddie.

“I’m jolly glad you came along,” Michael repeated.

He said it a third time when they landed back in England two hours later. The relieved squadron leader grinned and nodded tolerantly as he welcomed them back. “Find your way all right?”

“A piece of cake, apart from the bit at the end where the pinpoint turned out to be next to a ruddy great prison!”

The squadron leader laughed. “I’ll say you *did* find your way. That always comes as a surprise the first time. Proves you got there, though. Or did you have help?”

“He found it all himself,” Maddie said truthfully. “I can’t thank you enough for letting me go along.”

“April in Paris, eh?”

“Nearly as good as.” Maddie ached for Paris, imprisoned, inaccessible, remote.

“Not this year. Perhaps next!”

Michael went to bed whistling. Maddie found her way through the darkened Cottage with his tune stuck in her head. After a moment she recognized it as “The Last Time I Saw Paris.”

DEBRIEFING

It was nearly four o’clock in the morning when, brimming with elation, Maddie crept into the room she was sharing with Queenie. She checked that the blackout blinds were down and then lit a candle, not wanting to put on the lights and wake her friend. But Queenie’s bed was empty and unruffled, the counterpane smooth and straight. Queenie’s small travel case stood unopened by the foot of the bed, where Maddie herself

had set it down earlier. Whatever Queenie was here to do, she was still doing it.

Maddie put on her pajamas and pulled the blankets up to her chin, her mind full of air and moonlight and the silver Seine. She did not sleep.

Queenie came in at half-past five. She didn't think about whether she'd wake Maddie; she didn't even check that the blinds were down. She snapped on the electric light overhead, heaved her travel case onto the bare bureau, and hauled out the regulation WAAF pajamas and a hairbrush. Then she sat down in front of the mirror and stared at herself.

Maddie stared too.

Queenie was different. Her hair was pinned up as usual, but not in the signature French chignon twist she'd been wearing when Maddie had left her last night. Queenie's hair was scraped back severely from her forehead flat against her skull and wound into a tight bun at the nape of her neck. It wasn't flattering. It made her seem plainer, and her face was made up in pale colors that weren't flattering either. There was a harshness to the set of her mouth that Maddie had never seen before.

Maddie watched. Queenie laid down the hairbrush and slowly took off her blue WAAF tunic. After a moment Maddie realized she was being cautious, not slow—moving carefully, as though it were painful to stretch her shoulders. She took off her blouse.

One arm was livid with bruises, red turning purple, the clear, brutal marks of a big hand that had gripped her hard and not let go for some time. Her throat and shoulders were scored with similar ugly marks right the way 'round. Someone had tried to choke her to death a few hours ago.

She touched her throat gently and stretched her neck, examining the damage in the small mirror on the dresser. The room wasn't very warm, and after a minute or two, Queenie sighed and inched herself into the cotton shirt of her men's pajamas, still moving cautiously. Then she stood up, incautiously this time, and wrenched all the steel hairpins from her tightly bound hair. With a vicious scrape of the back of one

hand she scrubbed the beige lipstick from her mouth. Suddenly she looked very much more herself, just a bit disheveled, as though she'd pulled off a mask. She turned around and saw Maddie looking at her.

"Hullo," Queenie said with a crooked smile. "I didn't mean to wake you."

"You didn't." Maddie waited. She knew better than to ask what had happened.

"You saw?"

Maddie nodded.

"Doesn't *hurt*," Queenie said fiercely. "Not much. Just—it was hard work tonight. Had to do a bit more improvisation than usual, play it closer to the edge—"

She scrabbled abruptly in her tunic for her cigarettes. Maddie watched quietly. Queenie sat down on the end of Maddie's bed and lit a cigarette with hands that shook a little.

"Guess where I went with the lads tonight," Maddie said.

"To the pub?"

"To France."

Queenie spun around to stare at her, and saw the sky and the moon still lighting up Maddie's eyes.

"*France!*"

Maddie hugged her knees, reeling with the magic and menace of that stolen flight.

"You're not supposed to tell me that," Queenie said.

"I'm not," Maddie agreed. "I wasn't even supposed to have gone. But we didn't actually land there."

Queenie nodded and examined her cigarette. Maddie had never seen her friend quite so undone.

"You know what you looked like just now," Maddie said, "when you came in, with your hair pulled back in that strict Victorian governess way, you looked like—"

"—*Eine Agentin der Nazis*," Queenie supplied, taking a long, shaking drag on her cigarette.

"What? Oh. Yes. Like a German spy. Or everyone's idea of a German spy, anyway, fair and scary."

"I think I'm a bit small for the Aryan ideal," Queenie said, observing herself critically. She stretched her neck again, felt the bruised arm cautiously, and raised the cigarette to her lips, more steadily this time.

Maddie did not ask what had happened. She was never so petty. She did not dabble with minnows at the surface when there were thirty-pound salmon swimming deeper down.

"What," Maddie said quietly, "do you actually *do*?"

"Careless talk costs lives," Queenie retorted.

"I don't talk," Maddie said. "*What do you do?*"

"I speak German. *Ich bin eine*—"

"*Be sensible*," Maddie said. "You translate...what? Who do you translate for?"

Queenie turned toward her again with the narrow gaze of a hunted rodent.

"You translate for prisoners of war? You work for Intelligence—you translate at interrogations?"

Queenie hid herself in a cloud of smoke.

"I'm not a translator," she said.

"But you said—"

"No." Queenie was quiet too. "You said that. I told you I speak German. But I'm not a translator. I'm an interrogator."

It is *ridiculous* that you have not already guessed the nature of my Intelligence work, Amadeus von Linden. Like you, I am a wireless operator.

Like you, I am *bloody good at it*.

Our methods differ.

"On the job," as it were, I am called Eva Seiler. That was the name they used for me throughout my training—we were made to live and breathe our alter egos, and I got used to it—Seiler is the name of my school and was easy to remember. We had to discipline people who called me Scottie by accident. In English I can fake an Orkney accent better than a German one, so we went with that when I was operational—obscurely difficult to identify.

That first day—that first assignment, the very first one—remember how giddy everyone was the morning after, when they handed out all the champagne and perfume at The Cottage? I'd caught a double agent. A Nazi agent masquerading as a French Resistance courier. They'd suspected him and they brought me in to be there when they landed him in England—I caught him off guard at the low ebb of his strength and adrenaline (he'd had a long night being hauled out of France; they all did). He was a known womanizer; he didn't have the balls to admit he didn't recognize me when I threw myself at him in that frosty little debriefing room, laughing and weeping and exclaiming in German. The room was bugged and they heard everything we said.

It wasn't always that easy, but it paved my way. Mostly these men were all so desperate or confused by the time I appeared, with my neutral Swiss-accented German and comfortingly official checklist, that they were often gratefully cooperative, if not wholly bewitched. But not this night, not on the night last April when Maddie flew to France. The man I interviewed that night didn't believe in me. He accused me of treachery. Treason against the Fatherland—what was I doing working for the enemy, the English? He called me a collaborator, a backstabber, a filthy English whore.

You know—the stupid man's big mistake was in calling me ENGLISH. It made my fury wholly convincing. A whore—maybe I'll consider that in desperation; filthy, it goes without saying; but whatever else the hell I am, I AM NOT ENGLISH.

"You're the one who's failed the Fatherland, *you're* the one who's been caught," I snarled at him. "And *you're* the one who will face trial when you're returned to Stuttgart." I recognized his accent, a coincidence and a direct hit. "I am merely here doing my job as Berlin's interpretive liaison"—oh yes, I said that—"and how DARE you call me ENGLISH!"

At which point he launched himself at me—we don't usually bind these men—and took my head beneath his arm in a grip of iron.

"Call for help," he commanded.

I could have escaped. I've been trained to defend myself against an attack like that, as I think I proved during the street

brawl when I was arrested.

“Why?” Still sneering at him.

“Call for help. Let your English masters come to your aid, or I will break your neck.”

“Calling the English for help *would* be collaboration,” I gasped coldly. “I don’t depend on the English for *anything*. Go ahead and break my neck.”

They were watching, you know—there is a slotted window to the kitchen that they can watch through—and if I had called for help or seemed anything but wholly in control they *would* have come to my aid. But they saw what I was doing, what a tight wire I was walking, and they sat biting their nails and let me win that battle on my own.

And I did win. It ended some time later with him breaking down in tears on the floor, clutching at my leg and begging me to forgive him.

“Tell me your assignment,” I commanded. “Tell me your contacts, and I will filter what I pass on to the English. Tell me, and you have confessed to your countrywoman and given nothing to the enemy.” (I am shameless.) “Tell me, and perhaps I will forgive you for threatening to murder me.”

His behavior then was truly embarrassing, and I actually kissed him on the top of his head in benediction when he had finished. Miserable, nasty man.

Then I *did* call for help. But with disdain and dismissal, not with fear.

Good show, my dear. My, you’ve nerves of steel, haven’t you! Jolly good show, first rate.

I didn’t let on how much he’d hurt me, and they didn’t think to check. It was that night’s nerves of steel that landed me in France six weeks ago.

I forgot to change my hair back to normal when I changed my clothes—I don’t wear my WAAF uniform for interrogations. The hair was a small mistake. They took the nerves of steel into account, but not the small mistake. They didn’t notice that he’d hurt me and they didn’t notice that I do make fatal small mistakes from time to time.

But Maddie noticed both.

“Come get warm,” she said.

Queenie stubbed out her cigarette and turned off the light. She didn’t get into her own bed, though; she climbed in next to Maddie. Maddie put careful arms around the bruised shoulders, because her friend was shaking all over now. She hadn’t been before.

“It’s not a nice job,” Queenie whispered. “It’s not like your job—blameless.”

“I’m not blameless,” said Maddie. “Every bomber I deliver goes operational and kills people. Civilians. People like my gran and granddad. Children. Just because I don’t do it myself doesn’t mean I’m not responsible. I deliver *you*.”

“Blond bombshell,” Queenie said, and spluttered with laughter at her own joke. Then she began to cry.

Maddie held her lightly, thinking she would let go when her friend stopped crying. But she cried for so long that Maddie fell asleep first. So she didn’t ever let go.

*my heart is sair, I darena tell
my heart is sair for somebody
O, I could wake a winter’s night
a’ for the sake o’ somebody*

*ye pow’rs that smile on virtuous love
sweetly smile on somebody
frae ilka danger keep her free,
and send me safe my somebody*

*We two ha’e paddl’d in the burn
frae morning sun till dine;
but seas between us broad ha’e roar’d
sin’ auld lang syne*

*for auld lang syne, my friend
for auld lang syne
we'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet
for auld lang syne*

Oh, God, I am *so tired*. They have kept me at it all night. It is the third night I have had no sleep. Too little, at any rate. I don't recognize any of the people guarding me; Thibaut and Engel are all tucked up in their pensions, and von Linden is busy tormenting that screaming French girl.

I like writing about Maddie. I like remembering. I like constructing it, focusing, crafting the story, pulling together the memories. But I am so tired. I can't craft anything more tonight. Whenever I seem to stop, to stretch, to reach for another sheet of paper, to rub my eyes, this utter *shit* of a bastard who is guarding me touches the back of my neck with his cigarette. I am only writing this because it stops him burning me. He cannot read English (or Scots) and as long as I keep covering page after page with lines from "Tam o'Shanter" he does not hurt me. I can't keep it up forever, but I know an awful lot of Robert Burns by heart.

Burns, ha-ha, Burns to stop the burns.

Behead me or hang me, that will never fear me—

I'LL BURN AUCHINDOON ere my life leave me

Burning burning burning burning

Oh God, those pictures.

burning

Maddie.

Maddie

Von Linden himself put an end to the proceedings last night—came storming in like the Charge of the Light Brigade and swept the pages together while I fell flat on my face on the table in a pool of ink with my eyes closed.

“Lord God Almighty, Weiser, are you an idiot? She will not produce anything worth reading when she’s in this state. Look—this is *verse*. English doggerel. Pages and pages of it!” The Jerry philistine proceeded to wad everything I could remember of “Tam o’Shanter” into balls of wastepaper. I think he may read more English than he lets on, if he recognizes Burns as English. “Burn this rubbish. I have more than enough irrelevant nonsense out of her without you encouraging it! Give her water and take her back to her room. And *get rid of that filthy cigarette*. We will talk about that tomorrow.”

Which was as emotional an outburst as I have ever heard from him, but I think he is overtired too.

Oh yes, and ENGEL has been CRYING. Her eyes are very red and she keeps scrubbing at her nose, which is red too. I wonder what would make On-Duty-Female-Guard Fräulein Engel blub on the job.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS TRAINING

After that disastrous interview last April (it wasn’t disastrous for Intelligence, I suppose, but it left Eva Seiler a bit damaged) Berlin’s interpretive liaison was given a week’s leave To Think About Her Work and whether she wanted to continue it. In other words, Queenie was given the opportunity to Gracefully Bow Out. She spent the week in Castle Craig with her lady mother, the long-suffering Mrs. Darling (as it were)—poor Mrs. Darling never had a clue what any of her six children were

actually doing, or when they were coming or going, and she was not best pleased at the black marks on her fine-boned daughter's Celtic white skin.

"Pirates," Queenie said. "I was bound to the mast by Captain Hook."

"When this dreadful war is over," said her mother, "I want to know Absolutely *Every Last Detail*."

"Absolutely *Every Last Detail* of my work falls under the Official Secrets Act, and I will be thrown into prison for the rest of my life if I ever tell you anything about it," Queenie told her mother. "So stop asking."

Ross, the youngest of the Glaswegian evacuees, overheard this conversation—it was just as well Queenie *hadn't* given her lady mother any details (careless talk costs lives, etc.)—but the official-looking, pretty wireless operator became rather a worshipped goddess among the Craig Castle Irregulars after that—*she had been held prisoner by pirates*.

(I love those wee laddies, I really do. Nits and all.)

During that week also, Queenie's darling elegant French nanny, her lady mother's constant companion, in a fit of maternal compassion began to knit Queenie a pullover. Being limited in materials, due to shortages and rationing, she used a gorgeous sunset-colored wool that she had unraveled from a suit tailored for her by Ormaie's most expensive modiste in 1912. I mention my sweater's advent here because I think of it as part of the endgame—as though my poor loving nanny is a sort of Mme. Defarge, knotting my fate inexorably into the stitches of this nobly field-tested woolen garment. It doesn't look much like military issue, but it has seen active service and has the bloodstains to prove it. Also it is warm and fashionable—at least, the memory of fashion clings to it. It is still warm.

At the end of my week of reflection I decided that, like my dubious ancestor Macbeth, I was in figurative blood stepped in so far that there wasn't much point in turning back; and also I *loved* being Eva Seiler. I loved the playacting and the pretence and the secrecy of it, and I flattered myself with my own importance. Occasionally I pulled Very useful Information out of my "clients." Location of airfields. Aircraft types. Code.

Things like that.

At any rate, after that April interview, everyone, including Eva, agreed that she needed a change of scene. Perhaps a few weeks on the Continent, where she could put her sangfroid and multiple languages and wireless operator's skills to much-needed use in Nazi-occupied France.

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Do you know—you probably *do* know—that in enemy territory the life expectancy of a w/op, or W/T operator as they say in SOE, is only six weeks? That's the usual time it takes your direction-finding equipment to ferret out the location of a hidden radio set. The rest of a Resistance circuit, the web of contacts and couriers, skulks in shadows, squirreling away explosives and carrying messages that can't be trusted to a postman, moving every day, never meeting in the same place twice. At the hub of the wheel, still and vulnerable, the wireless operator sits amid a pile of equipment that is awkward to shift and difficult to conceal, snarled in a fixed web of stat and code, radiating noisy electric beacons that beckon your trackers like neon advertisements.

It is six weeks today since I landed here. I suppose that's quite a good innings for a wireless operator, though my success at staying alive for so long would carry more weight if I'd actually managed to set up a radio before I was caught. Now I really am living on borrowed time. Not much more to tell.

Still, Fräulein Engel will probably appreciate the closure of hearing about Maddie's operational flight to France. I suppose somebody *will* be court-martialed for that. I'm not sure who.

The Special Duties squadron leader was supposed to take me. The Moon Squadron was suffering a bit at the end of September—they'd had a fantastically successful summer, a dozen flights a month, twice as many agents dropped off and scores of refugees picked up—but injury and incident had winnowed their Lysander pilots down to four at this particular point in time, and one of those was so stricken with 'flu he couldn't stand up (they were all exhausted). You can see where this is going.

For me, the preparation took months—another parachute

course, then an elaborate field exercise in which I had to scramble around a real city (an unfamiliar one, they sent me off to Birmingham to do it) leaving coded messages for contacts I'd never met and arranging clandestine pickups of dummy parcels. The chief danger is that a policeman will notice your suspicious activities and arrest you—in which case it is quite difficult convincing your own authorities that you're not working for the enemy.

Then there were specific arrangements to do with my own assignment—taking apart and putting together every one of those flipping radios a dozen times; making sure my clothes couldn't be traced back to England, ripping the labels out of all my underthings (you see why the pullover is so ideal a garment—wholly anonymous and made over from locally obtained materials). Learning yards and yards of code—you know (all too well) that the wireless code gets keyed to poems so that it is easier to remember, and I was rather hoping von Linden would make his cipher breakers try to crack the “Tam o'Shanter” so I could laugh at them. But he is wise to me.

Then I had to undergo the nastiest sort of drills to make sure I had my story straight. They found it very difficult to simulate an interrogation for me. Most people find it disconcerting being woken in the middle of the night and dragged off for questioning, but I simply *could not* take it seriously. I knew the routine far too well. After about five minutes we would be wrestling over some detail of protocol or else something would send me into gales of laughter. In extremis they blindfolded me and held a loaded gun to the back of my head for nearly six hours—it was sinister and exhausting and I did go a bit wobbly eventually. (We all did. It wasn't fun.) But even so, I wasn't ever *afraid*. You *knew*—you knew you'd be all right in the end. There were a lot of people involved because they had to keep swapping over guards, and my C.O. refused to tell me who it had been, to protect them, you know? Two weeks later I presented him with a list of suspects that turned out to be 90 percent accurate. I'd made the narrow rodent eyes at *everybody* for a few days, and over the next week every single one of the men who had been in attendance that night bought me a drink. The women were harder to figure out, but I could have opened a black market corner shop with the chocolate and

cigarettes they slipped me. Guilt is a marvelous weapon.

So, mentally prepared, there was then packing to do—cigarettes (for gifts and bribes), clothing coupons (forged and/or stolen), ration cards, two million francs in small notes (now confiscated—it truly makes me ill to think about it), pistol, compass, brain. And then just waiting for the moon. Actually I was very good at being summoned to action without any notice; I was used to that (also at learning poetry by heart)—but this business of waiting, waiting, waiting for the moon, nibbling at your cuticles and watching the moon nibbling at the sky, is very testing. You sit by the telephone all morning, leap out of your skin when it rings; then when it turns out there's too much fog over the Channel, or the German army has put a guard over the farmer who owns the field you're supposed to land in, you're let off again for the rest of the day. Then there's nothing to do except mooch about wondering if you can bear to sit in a smoke-filled cinema watching *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* for the sixth time, and if you will get in trouble if you do, because the Prime Minister disapproves of it and secretly you fancy Anton Walbrook as the noble German officer and you're pretty sure your C.O. knows it. Just as you have decided "Bother the Prime Minister!" and are looking forward to spending another dreamy afternoon with Anton Walbrook, the phone rings again and You Are Operational.

Have I got the right shoes on, you wonder frantically, and *bloody hell*, where did I leave my two million francs?

AN IRREGULAR FERRY FLIGHT

Maddie, lucky beast, did not have to endure any of this. Maddie just picked up her ferry chit as usual from the Oakway Operations hut, grinned at the "S" and the destination "RAF Buscot" because it meant she'd get to share a cup of tea with her best friend at some point in the next twenty-four hours, and walked out to the Puss Moth with her gas mask and her flight bag. *It was routine*. Incredible to think what an ordinary day it was for her, to begin with.

It was still light when we landed at RAF Special Duties. Moonrise was early, half past six or so, and because of Double Summer Time we had to wait for it to get dark. Jamie—call sign John—was flying out that night, and Michael. The call signs are all from *Peter Pan*, of course. This particular night's venture was called Operation Dogstar, which seems appropriate. "Second to the right, and then straight on till morning."

It's awful, telling it like this, isn't it? As though we didn't know the ending. As though it could have another ending. It's like watching Romeo drink poison. Every time you see it you get fooled into thinking his girlfriend might wake up and stop him. Every single time you see it you want to shout, "You stupid ass, just *wait* a minute," and she'll open her eyes! "Oi, you, you twat, open your eyes, wake up! *Don't die* this time!" But they always do.

OPERATION DOGSTAR

I wonder how many piles of paper like mine are lying around Europe, the only testament to our silenced voices, buried in filing cabinets and steamer trunks and cardboard boxes as we disappear—as we vanish into the night and the fog?

Assuming you don't incinerate all record of me when you're done with it, what I'd love to capture, to trap here for eternity in amber, is how exciting it was to come here. Me skipping across the concrete as I got out of the Puss Moth, through crisp October air smelling of leaf smoke and engine exhaust, thinking, France, France! Ormaie again, at last! The whole of Craig Castle had wept for Ormaie as the German army marched in three years ago—we have all been here before, visiting *la famille de ma grandmère*—now the elms are all cut down for firewood and barricades, the fountains are all dry except the one they use to water horses and put out fires, and the rose garden in memory of my great-uncle in the Place des Hirondelles has been dug up and the square is full of armored vehicles. When I got here there was a row of rotting dead men hanging from a balcony of the Hôtel de Ville, the town hall. The

evil of daily life here is *indescribable*, and if this is civilization then it is beyond the capacity of my smallish brain to imagine the evil of a place like Natzweiler-Struthof.

You know, I speak German because I *love* German. What good was a degree in German literature going to do me? I was reading it because I *loved* it. *Deutschland, das Land der Dichter und Denker*, land of poets and thinkers. And now I will never even *see* Germany, unless they send me to Ravensbrück—I will never see Berlin, or Cologne, or Dresden—or the Black Forest, the Rhine Valley, the blue Danube. I hate you, Adolf Hitler, you selfish wee beastie of a man, keeping Germany all to yourself. YOu RUIN EVERYTHING

Bother. I did not mean to deviate like that. I want to remember—

How after supper, my admirer the police-sergeant-cook produced real coffee for us. How Jamie and Maddie lay on the hearthrug in front of the fire in the sitting room beneath the staring glass eyes of the stuffed foxes and partridges on the mantelpiece, Jamie's sleek blond head and Maddie's untidy black curls bent low together in conspiracy over Jamie's map, thoroughly against all regulations, discussing the route to Ormaie. How we all crowded around the radio to hear our own code announced on the BBC—"Tous les enfants, sauf un, *grandissent*"—the random message that told our reception committee in France whom to expect that night. It is the first line of *Peter Pan*. "All children, except one, grow up." Expect the usual lads with one exception—tonight there's one wee lassie coming along.

How we all sat shivering on deck chairs in The Cottage garden, watching the sun set.

How we all jumped when the telephone rang.

It was the squadron leader's wife. Peter—that is not his real name, Engel, you silly ass. Peter had met his wife for lunch, driven her to the railway station afterward, and almost immediately after dropping her off had been involved in a messy road accident in which he had broken half his ribs and been knocked completely unconscious for most of the afternoon. His wife had not heard about it earlier because she had been sitting on a train that had been three hours delayed after it was

shunted onto a siding to give priority to a troops train. In any case, Peter would not be flying to France tonight.

I confess that it was my idea to find a substitute.

After the sergeant hung up, there was a lot of flap as everybody gasped in dismay and concern and disappointment. We had been tut-tutting from time to time all evening over Peter's late arrival, but it never occurred to *anyone* that he wouldn't turn up well ahead of takeoff. And now it was dark and the BBC announcement had been made and the reception committees in France were waiting and the *Lysanders* were out there with their long-range tanks full of fuel and their rear cockpits full of guns and radios. And bouncing on her flat heels, full of coffee and nerve and code, was Eva Seiler, Berlin's interpretive liaison with London, soon to insinuate herself into the German-speaking underworld of Ormaie.

"Maddie can fly the plane."

She has *presence*, Eva Seiler or whomever she thought she was that night, and people pay attention to her. They don't always agree with her, but she does command attention.

Jamie laughed. Jamie, sweet Jamie—the interpretive liaison's loving toeless Pobble of a brother, laughed and said with force, "No."

"Why not?"

"Just—no! Never mind the breach of regulations, she's not even been checked out—"

"On a *Lysander*?" the liaison said scornfully.

"Night flying—"

"She does it without a radio or a map!"

"I don't fly without a map," Maddie corrected prudently, playing her cards close to her chest. "It's against the rules."

"Well, you don't have your destination or the obstacles marked most of the time, which is much the same thing."

"She's not flown to *France* at night," Jamie argued, and bit his lip.

"You made her fly to France," said his sister.

Jamie looked at Maddie. Michael, and the goddesslike Special Operations officer who was there to oversee Queenie's

packing, and the RAF police sergeant, and the other agents who were flying out that night, watched with interest.

Jamie played his ace.

“There’s no one to authorize the flight.”

“Ring the Bloody Machiavellian English Intelligence Officer.”

“He’s got no Air Ministry authority.”

ATA First Officer Brodatt made her move at last, and trumped him calmly.

“If it’s a ferry flight,” she said, “I can authorize it myself. Let me use the telephone.”

And she rang her C.O. to let him know she had been asked to taxi one of her usual passengers from RAF Special Duties to an “undisclosed Location.” And he gave her permission to go.

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He knows now.

Nacht und Nebel, night and fog. Eva Seiler is going to fry in hell. Oh—I wish I had some clue whether I have done the right thing. But I don't see how I can finish this story and keep Eva secret. I did promise to give him every last detail. And ultimately, I can't imagine that giving her identity away will change my fate much, whatever it is.

Because I'd written such a lot the day before yesterday it has taken a while for Hauptsturmführer von Linden to get caught up on the translation, and he and Engel (or somebody) must have kept going without me after I'd been locked up in my cell again last night. I have still not quite slept off the excesses of that day and was out cold at three a.m. or whenever it was that he came in—but woke instantly when the padlocks and bolts on my door began their official-sounding sequence of thuds and clicks, as it always fills me with the most curious mixture of wild hope and sick dread when they unlock my door. I have slept through air raids more than once, but when my door is unlocked I am instantly On My Guard.

I stood up. It is pointless backing against the wall, and I have stopped bothering about my hair. But the Wallace in me still makes me want to face the enemy on my feet.

It was von Linden of course—I almost want to say “as usual,” as he often comes in now to chat briefly with me about German literature when he's finished work. I think it is the only self-indulgence of his day's strict routine—*Parzival* as a nightcap, to clear his mind of the blood that flecks the silver pips on his black collar patches. When he stands in my door and asks my opinion on Hegel or Schlegel, I dare not give him less than my full attention (though I have suggested he needs to take modern writers like Hesse and Mann more seriously. How those schoolboys of his, back in Berlin, would love *Narziß und Goldmund!*).

So, a visit not wholly unexpected, only last night it was not “as usual”—he was *alight*. Animation and color in his face, his hands locked behind his back so I could not see them shaking (perhaps also so I would not notice his ring—I am wise to such evasive tactics). He threw the door wide so my cell was lit by the blazing electric bulbs in the interrogation room and uttered in disbelief, “*Eva Seiler?*”

He had only just found out.

“You lie,” he accused.

Why the hell would I lie about *that*? I’m Eva Seiler. Ha-ha, not really.

You know, I was *astonished* he had heard of me, that he seemed to know who Eva Seiler is. I’ll bet it was that imbecilic Kurt Kiefer who spilled the beans on her, after he got back to Paris and blabbed about his conquests. I warned Intelligence he wasn’t clever enough to be a double agent.

I suppose Eva *was* quite successful at extracting information the Jerries would rather not have leaked to the Brits, and perhaps she’s even become one of many niggling thorns in the Führer’s side. But I hadn’t thought von Linden would know who I was talking about (I might have mentioned her sooner if I had). At any rate I didn’t miss a beat—this is how I operate. This is what I am *so good at*. Give me a hint, *just one hint*, and I will fake it. It’s the thin end of the wedge for you, me laddie.

I scraped my hair back from my face in the severe headmistressy way they used to fix it, and holding it in place with one hand, I straightened my shoulders and clicked my heels together. If you don’t stand too close to someone who is taller than you, you can still affect to sneer down your nose at him. I said coldly, in German, “What *possible reason* could I have to *pretend* to be Berlin’s interpretive liaison with London?”

“What proof? You have no valid papers,” he said breathlessly. “You were caught with Margaret Brodatt’s papers on you, but you are not Margaret Brodatt, so why should you be Eva Seiler?”

I don’t think he knew whether he was talking to *me* or to *Eva* at this point. (He suffers a certain amount of sleep deprivation as well, due to the nature of his work.)

“Eva Seiler’s papers are all forgeries in any case,” I pointed out. “They wouldn’t prove anything.”

I paused—counted to three—and advanced on him. Two baby steps only, to make him feel advanced on. Still enough of a distance between us, a meter perhaps, that he could not make an advantage of his height. Then another step, to allow him the advantage. I let go of my hair and looked up at him, disheveled and feminine, all doe eyes and vulnerability. I asked in German, in a voice of wonder and hurt as though it had only just occurred to me, “What is your daughter’s name?”

“Isolde,” he answered softly, his guard down, and went *red as a beetroot*.

I had got him by the balls and he knew it. I fell about laughing, instantly myself again.

“I don’t need papers!” I cried. “I don’t need proof! I don’t need electrified needles and ice water and battery acid and the threat of kerosene! All I do is ask a question, and you answer it! What more perfect proof than one lovely word out of you—*Isolde*? I’m a wireless operator!”

“Sit down,” he commanded.

“What does Isolde think of your war work?” I asked. He took the final step toward me, using his height.

“*Down.*”

He is intimidating, and I am *so tired* of being punished for my legion small acts of defiance. I sat down obediently, quivering, expecting violence (not that he has ever laid a finger on me himself). I pulled the eiderdown up around my neck, an illusion of armor.

“Isolde is innocent of my war work,” he said. Then suddenly he sang softly:

“*Isolde noch*

Im Reich der Sonne

Im Tagesschimmer

Noch Isolde...

Sie zu Sehen,

Welch Verlangen!”

Isolde still in the realm of the sun, in the shimmering

daylight still, Isolde—How I long to see her!

(It is Wagner, one of the dying Tristan's arias. I can't quite remember it all.)

He has a light, nasal tenor—*so beautiful*. It hurt worse than being slapped, being shown the irony of his life. And of mine, of mine—OF MINE—Isolde alive in the day and the sun while I suffocate in Night and Fog, the *unfairness* of it, the random unfairness of *everything*, of me being here and Isolde being in Switzerland, and Engel not getting any cognac and Jamie losing his toes. And Maddie, Oh lovely Maddie,

MADDIE

I pulled the eiderdown over my head, sobbing at his feet.

Then he stopped very abruptly. He bent down and uncovered my head gently, without touching me.

"Eva Seiler," he breathed. "You might have spared yourself a great deal of suffering if you had confessed this sooner."

"But I wouldn't have been able to write it all down if I'd done that," I wept. "So it was worth it."

"For me as well."

(I suppose Eva Seiler must be a huge catch! He thought he'd reeled in yet another brown trout, and it turns out he's got a thirty-pound salmon struggling to wrench itself off his barbed fishhook. Perhaps he is hoping for a promotion.)

"You have redeemed me." He straightened up and bowed his head courteously. Almost a salute. Finally he said good night politely, in French: "*Je vous souhaite une bonne nuit.*"

And again I gratified him by gaping.

He slammed the door shut behind him.

He has been reading the Vercors—he has read *Le Silence de la Mer*, *The Silence of the Sea*—the French Resistance tract, *at my recommendation!* How else—?

He may get in trouble for it. He baffles me. I suppose it is mutual.

This time I know where I was, I know exactly where I left off. I know exactly where we were. Where Maddie was.

For the nth time, four different people checked over the ration books and parachutes and papers. They briefed Maddie, let her know whom she'd be collecting for the return trip, checked over the maps and the routes, gave her a call sign to use on the radio until she got to France ("Wendy," naturally). The police sergeant tried to give her a revolver. All the SD pilots carry pistols when they fly to France, he said, just in case. But she wouldn't take it.

"I'm not RAF," said Maddie. "I'm a civilian. It's a breach of international agreement to arm civilians."

So he gave her a *pen* instead—it's called an Eterpen, a truly wonderful thing, no messy ink to refill and it dries instantly.

He said they have ordered 30,000 of them for the RAF to use in the air (for navigation calculations) and a grateful RAF officer recently smuggled out of France had given one of the samples to Peter, who'd given it to the sergeant, who gave it to Maddie. The sergeant told her to pass it on to someone else when she had successfully completed her mission. He likes us very much.

Maddie was ridiculously pleased with her pen. (I did not appreciate then why it pleased her so much, the infinite supply of quick-drying ink, but I do now.) She also liked the idea of passing it on as a gift after a successful operation—a variation on the Aerodrome Drop-Off Principle. She confessed in a whisper to her passenger, "I wouldn't know what to do with a revolver anyway." Which was not entirely true, since on her second and third trips to Craig Castle, Jamie had taken her shooting and she had actually bagged not one but two pheasants with Queenie's 20 bore. But Maddie was—is? Was, all right, was. Maddie was a modest sort of person.

"Ready to do some practice landings?" Maddie asked her passenger casually, as though Ormaie were as ordinary a destination as Oakway. "They've lit the mock flares over at the training field. I've not often landed on the flare path at night, so we'll hop over there before we set sail."

"All right," her passenger agreed. It was impossible for either of them to be anything but elated—one of them on her way to France, the other flying the plane. Everything was loaded except Queenie—the sergeant offered her a hand up the

ladder to the rear cockpit.

“Wait, wait!”

She threw herself at Maddie. Maddie was rather startled. For a moment they held on to each other like shipwreck survivors.

“Come on!” Maddie said. “*Vive la France!*”

An Allied Invasion of Two.

Maddie made three perfect daisy cutter landings on the flare path, and then her stomach began to nag at her about losing the moon just the way it sometimes nagged at her about losing the weather over the Pennines. She set her course for France.

Southampton’s barrage balloons floated gleaming in the moonlight like the ghosts of elephants and hippos. Maddie crossed the silver Solent and the Isle of Wight. Then she was over the war-torn Channel. The drone of the engine mingled with her passenger humming over the intercom—“The Last Time I Saw Paris.”

“You are far too jolly,” Maddie scolded sternly. “Be serious!”

“We are told to smile *all the time*,” Queenie said. “It’s in the SOE instructor’s handbook. People who are smiling and singing don’t appear to be plotting a counterattack. If you go around looking worried, someone will start to wonder what you’re worrying about.”

Maddie did not answer, and after half an hour of flying over the serene, smooth, silver and black eternity of the English Channel, Queenie asked suddenly, “What *are* you worrying about?”

“It’s cloudy over Caen,” Maddie said, “and there’s light in the clouds.”

“What d’you mean, *light*?”

“Flickering light. Pinkish. Could be lightning. Could be gunfire. Could be a bomber squadron going up in flames. I’m going to change course a bit and go around it.”

This was a lark. Light in the clouds, who cares? Let’s change direction. We were *tourists*. Maddie’s alternative route

over the Normandy coast went straight over Mont St. Michel, the island citadel glorious in the moonlight, casting long moon shadows over the swelling tide in a bay that shone like spilt mercury. Searchlights swept the sky but missed the gray-bellied Lysander. Maddie set a new course for Angers.

“Less than an hour to go at this rate,” Maddie told her passenger. “Are you still smiling?”

“Like an idiot.”

After that—this is hard to believe, but it was a dull flight for some time after that. The French countryside was not as stunning by moonlight as the English Channel, and after a long time of staring into indistinguishable blackness, Queenie fell trustingly asleep, curled among the cardboard cases and baled wires on the floor of the rear cockpit with her head on her parachute. It was a bit like sleeping in the engine room of Ladderal Mill—noisy beyond belief but stupefyingly rhythmic. She had been keyed to fever pitch these past few weeks and it was well past midnight now.

She woke when her relaxed body was suddenly slammed against the back end of the fuselage along with all eleven crates. She was not hurt or even frightened, but she was hugely disoriented. Her subconscious mind held the reverberating echo of a hell of a bang, which had in fact been the thing that woke her rather than being tossed about. Bright orange light rimmed the windows of the rear cockpit. Just as she figured out that the Lysander was plunging earthward in a screaming dive, the increased gravity knocked her cold again. And when she woke up a second time, some moments later, it was dark and the engine was still throbbing reliably, and she was heaped uncomfortably among the tumbled cargo.

“*Can you hear me? Are you all right?*” came Maddie’s frantic voice over the intercom. “Oh *bother*, there’s another one—” And a lovely white ball of fire arched gracefully over the top of the Perspex canopy. It made no noise and lit the cockpit beautifully. *Limelight, limelight.* Maddie’s night vision was instantly ruined again.

“Fly the plane, Maddie,” she muttered to herself. “Fly the plane.”

Think of her three years ago, a weeping jelly of fear under fire. Think of her now, guiding a wounded aircraft through the unfamiliar fire and darkness of a war zone. Her best friend, untangling herself in the back of the plane, shivered with dread and love. She knew that Maddie would land her safely or die trying.

Maddie was battling the control column as though it were alive. In the brief phosphoric flashes her taut wrists were white with exertion. She gasped with relief when she felt her passenger's small hand gripping her shoulder through the gap in the armor-plated bulkhead.

"What's going on?" Queenie asked.

"Dratted antiaircraft guns in Angers. The tail's been hit. I think it was flak, not a night fighter, or we'd be dead. We don't stand a chance against a Messerschmitt 110."

"I thought we were falling."

"That was me screaming downhill to put out the fire," Maddie said grimly. "You just dive as fast as you can till the wind blows it out. Like blowing out a candle! But the tailplane control's come disconnected or something. It's—"

She gritted her teeth. "We're on course. We're still in one piece. We lost a bit too much height in that dive, but all the dratted plane wants to do now is climb, so, well, that's not a problem. Only, if we go much higher the Jerries might be able to see us on their Radar. The plane's still flyable, just, *and* we've made such good time we're not even behind schedule. Only, I think you should know that it's going to be—um—a bit of a challenge for me to land. So you might have to do another parachute jump."

"What about *you*?"

"Well, I might too, I suppose."

Maddie had not ever practiced jumping out of a plane, but she *had* practiced landing broken planes more times than she could count—had, indeed, landed broken planes on plenty of occasions—and both girls knew that if it happened a thousand times Maddie would every time die with her hands on the flight controls rather than trust a blind plunge into darkness.

Especially as, like most shot-down British airmen, she

spoke only the most basic schoolgirl French and had no clever forged identity to fall back on in Nazi-occupied France.

"I might drop you out and try to fly home," Maddie said casually, hopeful words spoken through clenched teeth.

"Let me help! Tell me something to do!"

"Look for the landing site. Less than half an hour to go. They'll flash at us when they hear us—Morse for Q. That's long-long-short-long."

The small hand did not let go.

"You'd better put your parachute on," Maddie reminded her passenger. "And make sure you've got all your gear."

There was a lot of crashing and cursing in the rear cockpit for a while. After a few minutes Maddie asked with a gasp of fearful laughter, "What are you *doing*?"

"Tying everything down. I'm responsible for this lot whether or not I see it again tomorrow morning. If we bounce I don't want to be strangled in electric wire. And if I have to jump out before you try to land, I jolly well don't want it trailing out after me and smacking me in the head."

Maddie said nothing. She was peering into the dark and flying the plane. Queenie gripped her shoulder again.

"Should be getting close," Maddie said at last. Her voice, faintly distorted over the crackling intercom, was neutral. There was nothing of either relief or fear in her tone. "Descending to 700 feet now, all right? Look for those flashes."

Those last fifteen minutes were the longest. Maddie's arms ached and her hands were numb. It was like holding back an avalanche. She hadn't looked at the map for the past half an hour and was navigating wholly by memory and the compass and the stars.

"Hurrah, we're in the right place!" she said suddenly. "See the confluence of those two rivers? We land right in between." She gave a shiver of excitement. The small, comforting hand gripping her shoulder suddenly let go.

"There."

Queenie pointed. How she'd spotted it through the page-sized gap in the bulkhead was a mystery, but she'd seen the

signal, a little to the left of them. Clear and bright flashes in fixed series—Q for Queen, long, long, short, long.

“Is that right?” Queenie asked anxiously.

“Yes. Yes!”

They both gave spontaneous yells.

“I can’t let go to give them the answer!” Maddie gasped.

“Have you got an electric torch?”

“In my kit. Hang on—what’s the letter to answer them?”

“L for Love. Dot-dash-dot-dot, short-long-short-short.

You’ve got to get it right or they won’t light up for us—”

“I’ll get it right, silly,” Queenie reminded her fondly. “I can flash Morse code in my sleep. Remember? I’m a wireless operator.”

Hauptsturmführer von Linden says he has never known any educated person so foul-mouthed as I am. No doubt it was extraordinarily stupid of me to bring his daughter's name into the catfight we had last night. This morning I am to have my mouth swabbed with carbolic—not carbolic SOAP, like they do in school, but actual carbolic ACID—phenol—which is the same stuff they use for lethal injections at Natzweiler-Struthof (according to Engel, my ever-flowing source of Nazi minutiae). She has diluted it with alcohol—she wore gloves to do the mixing, as it is incredibly caustic. But she won't come near me with it because she knows I will battle her and it will go everywhere. Even with my arms tied behind me (which they aren't, obviously) I would have a good go at getting it everywhere. I am hoping the whole situation will evaporate if we postpone it long enough, and I think she is too.

The catfight started over the heartbreaking French girl (I think she is the only other female prisoner here), whom they have been stubbornly and persistently questioning day and night all week, and she, just as stubborn and persistent as they are, refuses to answer their questions. Last night she was weeping noisily for hours, in between shrieks of genuine heart-stopping agony—I have actually *torn out* chunks of my hair (it is that brittle) whilst trying to endure her shrieking. At some point deep in the middle of the night I broke—she did not, but I did.

I jumped up and began to scream at the top of my lungs (*en français pour que la résistante malheureuse puisse me comprendre*):

“*LIE! Lie to them, you stupid cow! Say anything! Stop being such a damned martyr and LIE!*”

And I started wrestling insanely with the iron stub where the porcelain door handle used to be (before I unscrewed it and threw it at Thibaut's head), which is pointless, because of course the door handle and its attendant hardware are purely decorative and all the bolts and bars are fixed to the outside.

“LIE! LIE TO THEM!”

Oh—I got a result I did not expect. Someone came and pulled open the locks so suddenly that I fell out the door, and they picked me up and held me blinking in the sudden bright lights, while I tried not to look at the wretched girl.

And there was von Linden, in civilian clothes, cool and smooth as a new frozen curling pond and sitting in a cloud of acrid smoke like Lucifer himself (no one smokes when he is around—I don’t know and don’t want to know what they were burning). He didn’t speak, merely beckoned, and they brought me over to him and threw me to my knees.

He let me cower for a few minutes.

Then:

“You’ve advice for your fellow prisoner? I’m not sure she realizes you are addressing her. Tell her again.”

I shook my head, not really understanding what the hell he was playing at *this* time.

“Go to her side, look in her face, speak to her. Speak clearly so we can all hear you.”

I played along. I always play along. It is my weakness, the flaw in my armor.

I put my face alongside hers, as though we were whispering. So close it must have seemed intimate, but too close for us to actually look at each other. I swallowed, then repeated clearly, “Save yourself. Lie to them.”

She is the one who used to whistle “Scotland the Brave” when I first came here. She couldn’t whistle last night—it’s a wonder they thought she could even speak, after what they had done to her mouth. But she tried to spit at me anyway.

“She doesn’t think a great deal of your advice,” said von Linden. “Tell her again.”

“*LIE!*” I yelled at her.

After a moment she managed to answer me. Hoarse and harsh, her voice grating with pain, so that everyone could hear her. “Lie to them?” she croaked. “Is that what you do?”

I stood trapped. Perhaps it was a trap he had laid for me on purpose. All was very quiet for a long time (probably not so

long as it seemed), and finally von Linden directed with disinterest, “Answer her question.”

That was when I lost my senses.

“You *fucking hypocrite*,” I snarled at von Linden unwisely (he may not have known what the word meant in French, but still, it wasn’t a clever thing to say). “Don’t you ever lie? What the hell *do* you do? What do you tell your daughter? When she asks about your work, what *truth* does the lovely Isolde get out of you?”

He was white as paper. Calm, though.

“*Carbolic.*”

Everyone looked at him uncertainly.

“*She has the filthiest tongue of any woman in France. Burn her mouth clean.*”

I fought. They held me down while they argued about the correct dosage, because he hadn’t made clear whether or not he actually wanted them to kill me with the stuff. The French girl closed her eyes and rested, taking advantage of the shift in attention away from her. They’d got out the bottles and the gloves—the room became a clinic suddenly. The truly frightening thing was that not one of them seemed to know what he was doing.

“Look at me!” I screeched. “*Look at me*, Amadeus von Linden, you sadistic hypocrite, and *watch this time!* You’re not questioning me now, this isn’t your work, I’m not an enemy agent spewing wireless code! I’m just a minging Scots slag screaming insults at your daughter! So enjoy yourself and watch! Think of Isolde! *Think of Isolde and watch!*”

He stopped them.

He couldn’t do it.

I choked with relief, gasping.

“Tomorrow,” he said. “After she’s eaten. Fräulein Engel knows how to prepare the phenol.”

“Coward! *Coward!*” I sobbed in hysterical fury. “Do it *now!* Do it *yourself!*”

“Get her out of here.”

There was paper and pencil laid out for me as always this morning, and the drinking water waiting along with the phenol and alcohol, and Fräulein Engel is rapping her fingernails in impatience across the table as she always does while she waits for me to pass her something to read. She is waiting eagerly to see what I have written this morning, I know, as it has not been explained to her what I actually *did* last night to warrant such vicious punishment. Von Linden must be asleep (he may be inhuman, but he is not superhuman). Oh, God. There isn't much left for me to write. What is he expecting me to finish with? Isn't the end of the story rather obvious? I want to finish it, but I hate to think about it.

Miss E. has managed to scrounge some ice for my water. It will have melted by the time we get around to scouring out the filthiest mouth in France, but it was a nice thought.

Now we are back in the air again, suspended over the fields and rivers north of Ormaie and under a serene but not-quite-full moon at its splendid silver height, in a plane that can't be landed. The wireless operator flashes the correct signal to the ground and barely a minute later the flare path appears. It is perfectly familiar, three flickering points of light forming an upside-down L, just like the makeshift runway Maddie made her efficient practice landings on four hours ago in England.

Maddie circled once over the field. She didn't know how long the flare path would stay lit, and didn't want to waste the light. She began to descend in the oblong flight pattern she'd used earlier. Over her shoulder, through the opening in the bulkhead, her friend watched the faintly illuminated dial on the instrument panel that showed the altitude—they weren't losing much height.

"Can't *do* it," Maddie gasped, and the Lysander floated rapidly upward like a helium balloon. She hadn't even added power. "I just can't do it! Remember what I told you about the first Lysander I ever landed, how the handwheel for adjusting the tailplane was broken, and the ground crew thought I wouldn't be strong enough to hold the control column forward without trimming it? Only, I was able to set it neutral before I

got in. Well, it's not neutral now, it's stuck in the climb—for the last *hour* it's taken every ounce of strength I have to stop us climbing—and I'm just not strong enough to hold it far enough forward that we can land. I keep dropping power and it doesn't make any difference. If I turn the engine off and try to dump the dratted thing down in a dead stall I think it'll *still* try to climb. And then it'll fall into a spin and kill us. If I could stall it, that is. It's impossible to stall a Lizzie."

Queenie didn't answer.

"Going 'round," Maddie grunted. "Going to have another go anyway, try a shallower descent. Still have quite a lot of fuel, don't really want to crash and go up in flames."

They'd soared up to two and a half thousand feet in the time it took Maddie to explain all this. She flexed her wrists and wrestled the control column forward again. "Bother. Drat. *Double drat.*" ("Double drat" is the most fearsome oath Maddie ever swears.)

She was getting tired. She didn't manage to descend as far as she had the first time, and overshot the field. She turned back steeply, lost no height, and swore again as the airframe shuddered, automatic flaps clattering alarmingly as the plane tried to decide what speed it was flying.

"Perhaps not impossible to stall!" Maddie gasped. "Jolly well don't want to stall at five hundred feet or we're *dead*. Let me think..."

Queenie let her think, watching the altimeter. They were gaining height again.

"Climbing on purpose now," Maddie said grimly. "I'll take you up to 3000 feet. Don't want to go higher or I'll never get back down. You'll be able to jump safely."

That horrid trio of guards has just come to fetch me somewhere—Engel chatting with them in annoyed tones *just* beyond my range of hearing, outside the door. They did not appear to be gloved, so perhaps they are not here to administer the phenol. Please God. Oh *why* am I so coarse and thoughtless? Whatever it is now, I dread not being able to finish almost more than I dre

I have fifteen minutes.

The battered French girl and I were taken together down through the cellars and out to a little stone courtyard that must once have been the hotel's laundry. She proud & limping, her pretty bare feet hideous with open wounds and her white face swollen with bruising, ignoring me. We were tied to each other, wrist to wrist. In that small stone space open to the sky they have erected a guillotine. It is the usual way a woman spy is executed in Berlin.

We had to wait while they prepared this and that—threw open a gate to the lower lane to shock & entertain passers-by, hoisted the blade & ropes in place, etc. I don't know how the mechanics of it work. It had been used recently, blood still on the blade. We stood tied together mutely, and I thought, They will make me watch. They will kill her first and make me watch. Then they will kill me.

I knew she knew it too, but of course she would not look at me or speak to me, though the backs of our hands were touching.

Five minutes.

I told her my name. She did not answer.

They cut the cords that tied us together. They pulled her forward and I did watch—I did not look away from her face. It was all I could do.

She called out to me just before they pushed her into position on her knees there.

“My name is Marie.”

I cannot believe I am still alive; I have been brought back here to this same table and made to pick up the pencil again. Only it is von Linden who sits across the table from me now, not E. or T. He is watching me, as I requested him to do.

When I rub my eyes, my hands come away from my face with Marie's blood still red and fresh on my knuckles.

I asked v.L. if I could write this down before I continue the

day's work. He said I indulge too much in the detail of what happens to me here—an interesting record but not to the point. He's allowed only 15 min. for this—he's timing it.

I have 1 min. left. I wish I could have told more, done her justice, given her something more meaningful than my worthless name.

After my fiasco last night, I think they killed her for *no reason* other than to scare me into confessing that I have lied to them. It is my fault she is dead—one of my worst fears realized.

But I have not lied.

Von Linden says to me now: "Stop."

He leans back, watching me coolly. The phenol is still sitting there where Engel left it, but I do not think they are going to use it. I told him to watch me and he is watching.

"Write, little Scheherazade," he says. It is a command. "Tell of your last minutes in the air. Finish your tale."

Marie's blood stains my hands, figuratively and literally. I must finish now.

"You tell me when to go," Queenie said. "Tell me when you're ready."

"I will."

The small hand on Maddie's shoulder didn't let go, all through the climb. Maddie glanced down at the flare path far below, three pinpoints of light beckoning, welcoming, calling—and she made up her mind to try to land. But not with a passenger, not with anyone else's life in her hands—not with anyone she might fail.

"All right," Maddie said. "You'll be all right here. It's a bit windy, so keep your eye on the lights and try to land on the flare path! They're waiting for you. You know how to get out?"

Queenie squeezed Maddie's shoulder.

"Better do it quick," Maddie said. "Before the blooming plane goes any higher."

"Kiss me, Hardy," Queenie said.

Maddie gave a sobbed gasp of laughter. She bent her head to the cold hand on her shoulder and kissed it warmly. The small fingers brushed her cheek, gave her shoulder one last squeeze, and retreated through the bulkhead.

Maddie heard the rear canopy slide open. She felt the faintest dip in the aircraft's balance as the weight shifted. Then she flew alone.

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You know Mary, Queen o' Scots, (whose grandmother, incidentally, was French, like mine; as was her mother)—Mary, Queen of Scots, had a little dog, a Skye terrier, that was devoted to her. Moments after Mary was beheaded, the people who were watching saw her skirts moving about and they thought her headless body was trying to get itself to its feet. But the movement turned out to be her dog, which she had carried to the block with her, hidden in her skirts. Mary Stuart is supposed to have faced her execution with grace and courage (she wore a scarlet chemise to suggest she was being martyred), but I don't think she could have been so brave if she had not secretly been holding tight to her Skye terrier, feeling his warm silky fur against her trembling skin.

I have been allowed to use the past three days to re-read all I've written and check it over. It makes sense and it's almost a good story.

Fräulein Engel will be disappointed, though, that it doesn't have a proper ending. I am sorry. She's seen the pictures, too; there's no point in making up something hopeful and defiant if I'm meant to be telling the truth. But be honest yourself, Anna Engel, wouldn't you rather Maddie hit the ground running, as the Yanks say, and made it safely back to England? Because that would be the happy ending, the right ending for a jolly girls' adventure story.

This pile of paper doesn't stack together very well—pages and pages of different widths and lengths and thicknesses. I like the flute music that I had to write on at the end. I was careful with that. Of course I have had to use both sides and write over the music, but I wrote very lightly in pencil between the notes, because someone may want to play it again someday. Not Esther Lévi, whose music it was, whose classically biblical Hebrew name is written neatly at the top of each sheet; I'm not stupid enough to think she'll ever see this music again, whoever

she is. But perhaps someone else. When the bombing stops.

When the tide turns. And it will.

One thing I have noticed, reading over this story, which not even Hauptsturmführer von Linden has noticed, is that I have not put my own name down on anything I have written in the past three weeks. You all know my name but not, I think, my full name, so I am going to write it down in all its pretentious glory. I used to like to write my full name when I was small—as you will see, it was quite an accomplishment for a small person:

Julia Lindsay MacKenzie Wallace Beaufort-Stuart

That is what it says on my real papers, which you have not got. My name is a bit of a defiance against the Führer all on its own, a much more heroic name than I deserve, and I still enjoy writing it out, so I will write it again, the way I write it on my dance cards:

Lady Julia Lindsay MacKenzie Wallace Beaufort-Stuart

But I don't ever think of myself as Lady Julia. I think of myself as Julie.

I am not Scottie. I am not Eva. I am not Queenie. I have answered to all three, but I never introduce myself by those names. And how I have detested being "Flight Officer Beaufort-Stuart" these past seven weeks! That is what Hauptsturmführer von Linden usually calls me, so polite and formal—"Now, Flight Officer Beaufort-Stuart, you've been very cooperative today, so if you have had enough to drink, let's begin on the third set of codes. Please be accurate, Flight Officer Beaufort-Stuart, no one wants to have to ram this red hot poker through your eyeball. Could someone please sluice out Flight Officer Beaufort-Stuart's soiled panties before she is taken back to her room?"

So even though it is my name, I don't think of myself as Flight Officer Beaufort-Stuart, either, any more than I am Scheherazade, the other name he's given me.

I am Julie.

That is what my brothers call me, what Maddie called me always, and that is what I call myself. That is what I told Marie my name is.

Oh, God—if I stop writing now, they will take this paper away, all of it, the yellowed recipe cards and the prescription sheets and the embossed stationery from the Château de Bordeaux and the flute music, and I will be left with nothing but to wait for von Linden's judgment. Mary Stuart had her Skye terrier—what comfort will I take with me to my execution? What comfort for any of us—Marie, Maddie, the cabbage-stealing scullion, flute girl, the Jewish doctor, alone at the guillotine or in the air or in the suffocating freight wagons?

And why? *Why?*

All I have done is buy myself time, the time to write this. I haven't really told anyone anything of use. I've only told a story.

But I have told the truth. Isn't that ironic? They sent me because I am so good at telling lies. But I have told the truth.

I have even remembered some electrifying famous last words which I have been saving up to finish with. They are Edith Cavell's, the British nurse who smuggled two hundred Allied soldiers out of Belgium in The Last Lot, the 1914– 1918 war, and who was caught and shot for treason. Her very ugly monument stands not far from Trafalgar Square and I noticed it, not bombed but buried in sandbags, when I was last in London ("The Last Time I Saw London"). Some of her last words are carved on the statue's plinth.

"Patriotism is not enough—I must have no hatred or bitterness for anyone."

She has ALWAYS got a pigeon on her head, even under the sandbags, and I think the only reason she manages not to feel any hatred for those flying rats is because she has been dead for twenty-five years and doesn't know they're there.

I think her actual last words were "I am glad to die for my country." I can't say I honestly believe such sanctimonious twaddle. Kiss me, Hardy. The truth is, I like "Kiss me, Hardy" better. Those are fine last words. Nelson *meant* that when he

said it. Edith Cavell was fooling herself. Nelson was being honest.

So am I.

I am finished now, so I will just sit here writing it again and again until I can no longer stay awake or someone discovers what I am doing and takes the pen away. I have told the truth.

I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth.

I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth. I have told the truth.

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[Note to Amadeus von Linden from Nikolaus Ferber, translated from the German:]

SS-Sturmabführer N. J. Ferber

Ormaie 

30 November 1943

SS-Hauptsturmführer von Linden—

This is my final reminder to you that Flight Officer Beaufort-Stuart is a designated NN prisoner. She has been seen twice in your custody and I will be forced to take formal action against you if it happens again.

I recommend you send her at once to Natzweiler-Struthof as a specimen, with the order that she be executed by lethal injection after six weeks if she survives the experimentation.

If you show this devious little liar one atom's worth of compassion I will have you shot.

Heil Hitler!

quing myself in de-
g wholly back into the
made a sensational
four days since I last
paper. When they did
pent the whole morn-
ged my life. By the
a bit tired of sitting
ready shown me the
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Apparently the char-

Part 2

kittyhawk

I have got Julie's identity papers.

I have got Julie's identity papers.

I have got Julie's identity papers.

DRAT DRAT DOUBLE DRAT AND BLAST

I HAVE GOT JULIE'S IDENTITY PAPERS

WHAT WILL SHE DO WITHOUT ID???

What will she do?

Just can't think when it happened. She checked her papers, I checked my papers, Sergeant Silvey checked both of us, that headmistress Special Operations officer who was nannying her checked, everybody checked. Anyone could have muddled them.

Drat. Double drat. She must have mine.

This isn't a very good place to write things—will ruin my ATA Pilot's Note Book and I probably shouldn't make a record in any case, but it is the only thing I have to read or write on or do anything with until one of the Resistance circuit comes back. Can't believe I didn't check sooner. Two days have passed since we got here. I have looked and looked and I have got my ATA Authorization Card, but my license and National Registration card are gone, and in their place are Julie's ration coupons and forged *carte d'identité*—photograph doesn't really look like her, she's wearing her fair and scary Nazi spy face. Katharina Habicht. Can't think of her as Katharina at all, though she tried to make me call her Käthe all summer—had only just got used to thinking of her as Eva.

Not that my own papers or lack of make any difference to me as I AM NOT SUPPOSED TO BE IN FRANCE. But Julie, who is supposed to be here, has NO IDENTITY. I have got her FORGED IDENTITY DOCUMENTS.

How—how? Like when Intelligence took my clothing coupons, but that was done on purpose. And I swore to be more careful.

I don't know what to do.

If I am caught writing this I will be in trouble, whoever catches me—German, French, British. Even American. I

shouldn't write anything down. COURT-MARTIAL. But I have absolutely nothing else to do, and I have the most marvelous pen in the world—an Eterpen, it has a tiny ball bearing in the nib and is full of quick-drying printer's ink. The ink rolls over the ball. You can write with this pen at altitude and it does not smudge and the supply of ink lasts for a year. The RAF have ordered 30,000 of these pens from the exiled Hungarian newspaperman who invented them and I have got one of the samples, a gift from Sergeant Silvey, who is soft on lady pilots and small, fair double agents.

I know I shouldn't write but I've got to do something—something. That last ferry flight would have been an “S” chit, so that means I'll have to make a report. Also an Accident Report. ugh. I will have to do it anyway. I'll work on that.

ACCIDENT NOTES

Crash landing in field Damask, near Ormaie, 11 Oct. 1943—
Aircraft Lysander R 3892

Permission for flight obtained from C.O. and I had made 4 successful night landings, 3 on simulated flare path, immed. previous to departure. Flight over Channel w/out incident although deviated from planned course over Caen to avoid anti-aircraft fire. New route took us from Mont. St. Michel to Angers, where the aircraft was shot at from the ground and the tailplane was hit. I took action to control fire but could not achieve level flight as tailplane control was completely gone, aircraft now trimmed for steep climb and barely maneuverable in descent

Now that I think about it, the tailplane adjustment cable must have snapped during the climb out from the dive—or I wouldn't have been able to dive.

That thought has given me chills, that has.

All right. Where were we? Stuck in the climb and also lacking

some rudder control. Engine pressures/temps & fuel levels acceptable so continued to destination, which (w/passenger's assistance) I had no trouble in locating—however on arrival found descent v. difficult and was concerned about touchdown, and agreed passenger should bail out over airfield as she'd had appropriate training and was more likely to survive a parachute jump than a crash-landing with half-full fuel tanks and cargo of 500 pounds' Explosive 808 and detonating wire.

Had already attempted 2 circuits over field prior to passenger's departure and found it dead tiring so I stayed overhead for half an hour to burn off fuel before a final attempt to land. Flare path remained lit so I assumed and had to trust that I was still expected—possibly my passenger had come down safely and informed the reception committee about the damage to the aircraft. Maintaining level flight continued to prove challenging and eventually I attempted a descent.

Not sure how I actually managed to get the dratted thing down. Sheer obstinacy I expect. Rudder wouldn't let me sideslip, and even at low speed with flaps down and no power the blasted thing wanted to stick its nose up. Couldn't let go to put the landing light on, came down in the dark tail first and bounced straight back up again—wish I'd seen it from the ground—snapped off the whole tailplane and the poor Lizzie came to rest with the back of the fuselage stuck in soft ground at the very end of the field, near where the rivers meet, the whole aircraft pointing at the sky like a standing stone. Made me think of Dymrna's Puss Moth crash back on Highdown Rise, only the other way up. I didn't know what had happened till afterward, as the control column thumped me in the stomach and knocked the wind out of me at the same time as the back of my head banged against the armor plating of the bulkhead. Woke up hanging on my back in the cockpit staring at the stars and wondering how long before the Bang.

I'm not managing to make it sound like an accident report—bother. At least getting it down while I remember.

Had switched off ignition and fuel before landing as per Pilot's Notes and Standing Orders for forced landing, so all was quiet, a few creaks and groans but nothing else. Then three men of the reception committee, one of them English (an SOE agent,

the organizer of this circuit, code name Paul), slid open the canopy and pulled me out of the cockpit upside down. All four of us landed on the ground in a big heap. These were my first words on French soil:

“Sorry, I’m sorry, I’m so sorry!”

Over and over, thinking of the unlucky pair of refugees who were supposed to be ferried back to England on my return trip. And for good measure I remembered to say in French: “*Je suis désolée!*” Oh, what a mess.

They helped me sit up and tried to get the mud off me. “This’ll be our Verity,” the SOE organizer Paul said in English.

“I’m not Verity!”

This was not helpful information, but it is what I burst out with.

Confusion and mayhem and a gun held to my head. Sorry to say the gun was far too much to cope with following my first ever reportable prang, in a plane I probably shouldn’t have been flying, and I burst into tears.

“Not Verity! Who the hell are you?”

“Kittyhawk,” I sobbed. “Code name Kittyhawk. First Officer, Air Transport Auxiliary.”

“Kittyhawk! My God!” exclaimed the English agent. “You flew me to RAF Special Duties the night I came to France!” Paul explained me in French to his companions, then turned back to me and said, “We were expecting Peter!”

“He had a smashup in his motorcar this afternoon. I shouldn’t—”

He covered my mouth with a big muddy hand, and commanded, “Don’t say anything that could compromise you.”

I started blubbing again.

“What happened?” he asked.

“Flak over Angers,” I sobbed. This was my proper normal guns-and-bombs reaction, coming an hour and a half later than usual. “Set fire to the tail and disconnected the tailplane trim cable and I think one of the rudder cables too. Had to dive to put the fire out, knocked poor Ju—Verity—out cold in the back, then had to fight the plane so hard for the last leg that I

couldn't look at the map—”

And more sob, sob, sob, dead embarrassing.

“You were hit?”

They were all astonished. Not because I'd been hit, I discovered later, but because I'd successfully managed not to go down in flames over Angers, and had safely delivered them their 500 pounds of Explosive 808. They have been painfully nice to me ever since, all of them. I don't really deserve it. There is only one reason I did not go down in flames over Angers, and that is because I knew I had Julie in the back. Would never have had the presence of mind to put that fire out if I hadn't been trying to save her life.

“Going to have to destroy your plane, I'm afraid,” Paul said next.

Didn't know what he meant at first, as I thought I'd done a dead brilliant job of destroying it myself.

“Won't be able to use this field again,” he said. “Pity. However—”

They'd shot a German sentry.

I really ought not to be writing this.

I don't care. I'll burn it later. Can't think straight unless I write it.

They'd shot a German sentry. He had come along on his bicycle at the wrong moment, while they were laying out the flare path. He'd stood for a while watching and, as it turned out, taking notes—when they spotted him he pedaled off as fast as he could go and they couldn't chase him on foot or get to their own bicycles in time to catch up with him, so the English agent shot him. Just like that. They were pleased to have bagged a bicycle but horrified that they had a body to dispose of.

The wrecked Lizzie, with living pilot, was a godsend. They would have had to destroy the plane anyway, to make it look like a crash rather than a planned landing. So they installed the dead patrolman in the pilot's cockpit dressed in my ATA tunic and slacks, believe it or not. They had to slit the trousers right down the side seams to get them on the poor chap and even then couldn't fasten them, he was so much wider than me. It all

took a while and I didn't help much, sitting quite dazed on the edge of the field wearing only a camisole and panties under a borrowed sweater and overcoat. Mitraillette, who gave me her pullover, must have been freezing with only that frilly blouse under her coat. They also took my boots—I'm brokenhearted about my boots! But apart from my flight bag, all my British pilot's gear had to be destroyed, helmet and parachute and all. Even my gas mask. Won't miss that. All it ever did was take up space, dangling uselessly over my shoulder in its haversack like a wingless khaki albatross for the past four years. Don't think I ever put it on except for drills.

Wish I'd taken that typist's course now—could do with knowing shorthand. I have managed to fit this in 3 pages of my Pilot's Notes in the titchiest print ever. It's not a bad thing if it's impossible to read.

Getting the plane ready to blow to blazes took a long time—and a lot of running around in the moonlight. Suppose they're organized but I hadn't much clue what was going on and was neither useful nor necessary at this point. Was also developing a splitting headache, anxious about Julie, and wondering why they didn't just set the dratted plane on fire and get it over with. Turns out they had quite a lot of equipment they wanted to get rid of, in addition to the damning corpse—half a dozen useless wireless sets they'd stripped for parts, plus a couple of obsolete ones nobody wanted any-more—they sent someone to fetch them out of hiding, headed off on bicycles and returned with wheelbarrows. The barn they'd used to hide this stuff is where I am hiding now. The farmer who owns it threw in an old gramophone missing its horn and a broken typewriter in a cardboard suitcase, and a chick incubator full of bits of wire too short to connect to anything, to make it look like the plane had been carrying a full load of wireless sets! Mitraillette, the farmer's elder daughter who was the only other girl there besides me, was very jolly about filling the plane with rubbish.

"Onze radios!" she kept muttering to herself and giggling. *"Onze radios!"* Eleven wireless sets. It is a joke because it is so unlikely we would send eleven sets at once. Each set is linked to its operator, and each operator is equipped with distinct code and crystals and frequencies.

It will puzzle the Germans when they examine the wreckage.

The 500 pounds of Explosive 808 was dragged away on a horse-drawn wagon. It took time to find it all as a few of the boxes had fallen out of the damaged fuselage and the rear cockpit, which Julie had left open, of course. She'd done a jolly good job of tying most of the cargo down. It was all done by moonlight because nobody dared use any lights—there is an early curfew so everybody was growing extremely nervous—I'd landed after 1:00 a.m. and it took about an hour to organize the destruction of the Lizzie.

Can't say I feel entirely safe in the hands of the Resistance, but they are certainly resourceful. Once the radios and mock radios were piled up, and the dead German fixed in place, they simply opened the fuel tanks—of course the plane was nearly vertical and the fuel came pouring out—and used a bit of the explosive and detonating wire to light it. Easy peasy. It made a very jolly bonfire.

It must have been nearly 3 in the morning by the time we raced away from the field as Peter's Lysander went up in flames. Had to ride in one of the wheelbarrows as I now had neither trousers nor shoes—they hid me under the same sacking they'd used to hide the radios, stinking of onion and cows. Then handed me up a series of makeshift ladders into a loft above another loft in the barn where I am now. It is a hidden space just below the peak of the roof. Can just manage to sit up if I wedge myself right below the peak. I've not started feeling claustrophobic yet. I suppose I do spend most of my life strapped into tiny cramped spaces. There is plenty of room to stretch out if I lie down. Pretend it's the back of a Fox Moth—it's just as cold. Most awkward for washing and things, all water and soiled pans have to be handed up and down the ladders.

Can't think what else there is to tell about the crash. I've been clothed and fed and sheltered very generously considering they'll all be shot if I'm discovered. I'm a huge risk—a danger to myself and everyone around me, probably the only shot-down Allied airwoman outside Russia. I've seen the leaflets. Ten thousand francs reward for captured Allied flight crew or parachutists, "more under certain circumstances." "Certain

circumstances” are bound to include a lass who can give the Luftwaffe a position fix on the RAF Moon Squadron.

And this terrifies me, and if I never tell anyone my real name perhaps no one will notice, but in addition to all that, *I am Jewish*. It is true that I went to a Church of England grammar school and our diet is not in the least bit kosher even in the holidays and Grandad is the only one of us who ever goes to synagogue. But I am still a Brodatt. I don’t think Hitler will let me off for being godless.

Best not think about it.

I didn’t think about anything for the first day and a half. Slept more than 24 hours, flat out, which is just as well because that was the day when the farm was simply crawling with German soldiers. The crash site was cordoned off for 2 days as they took photographs from every possible angle, including the air, and sifted through the wreckage. It’s still cordoned off but apparently they have a hard time keeping out the usual vultures—small boys hunting for RAF souvenirs! A much more dangerous hobby in France than at home.

I am still unbelievably sore—not from the crash but from holding the dratted plane in level flight all during that final hour. Every muscle on fire all the way up my arms, right from fingertips to shoulders and even across my back. Feel like I’ve been wrestling tigers. Don’t mind being able to rest, really. I never quite feel fully rested even on my days off. I could sleep for a week.

Starting to nod again now. Light comes in through slats netted over with chicken wire to keep out pigeons. The platform of this loft space is halfway up the slats—if you were suspicious and counted them, you would see more slats on the outside than on the inside. It’s a clever hiding place, but not foolproof. Before I fall asleep again I am going to construct some place to hide these stupid notes. If anyone reads this, court-martial will be the least of my worries.

I wish Julie would turn up.

Spent all this afternoon (Thurs. 14 Oct) on the threshing floor of this barn learning to fire a Colt .32 revolver. What fun.

Mitraillette and a few of her chums kept guard, Paul provided lessons and gun. The gun is part of his SOE kit, but he has got a bigger one, a Colt .38, from an arms drop, and they all think I need one as I have nothing else to hide behind—no papers and very little French. As far as Paul's concerned I'm just another SOE agent to be trained up quickly—not sure how this happened, but at any rate I am learning to be proficient in the SOE's "Double Tap" system. You fire twice, rapidly, each time you aim so you never have to take any prisoners. I am a decent shot. I think I would even find it quite a satisfying challenge if it weren't for the noise—and Paul's wandering hands. I remember him now, from that ferry flight in England. His hand on my thigh IN THE AIR. Ugh. Mitraillette says it is not just me, he does it to every woman under 40 who comes near enough for him to touch. Don't know how Julie puts up with such stuff, encourages it even, as part of her work. I suppose she's just bolder than me, in that as in everything.

Mitraillette, it turns out, is not the Resistance girl's real name. She laughed at my stupidity for thinking it was—it is her code name. She has told me both, as it is awkward her father shouting her real name just below my louvered window when she's supposed to come feed the hens—it is a poultry farm. I won't write down her real name. Mitraillette means "submachine gun." It suits her.

Maman—her mother—is from Alsace and the children all speak German fluently. There is a younger sister they call La Cadette—think it means "the little sister." The brother, the eldest, is a Gestapo officer—an actual Frenchman who has been made an underling in the Ormaie Gestapo headquarters. The family, including Maman, despise the boy's Nazi collaboration, but they fuss and cluck over him when he visits home. Apparently collaborators are so violently detested in Ormaie that anyone will shoot them, even ordinary citizens who have no connection to the Resistance, and he has to keep his head down. Etienne, I think he's called, his real name. He does not know it but he is quite safe. He is brilliant cover for his own

family's Resistance entanglement and there are orders out to keep him alive.

Mitraillette spent a good two hours chatting with me last night, up here in the loft in the dark. Her English is as rubbish as my French, but though we persist in thoroughly mangling both languages, we understand each other pretty well. We were watching the road while they shifted some of the explosive—she has a wooden bird whistle for warning the people below if she sees headlamps coming down the hill. Since I arrived the explosive has been not-very-safely hidden under bales of hay on the floor of the barn. This building is easily 300 years old, probably more, timber-framed wattle-and-daub plaster like Wythenshawe Hall, and if anyone should drop a match or cigarette the whole place would go up like Vesuvius. There's no way I'd ever be able to get out. I try not to think about it.

I also try not to fret over Julie. Word is that the day before yesterday she met her first contact. I don't know where or who—my information is all thirdhand—but what a huge relief to know she landed safely! My understanding is that the reception committee who prepared the landing field is not connected to Julie's prearranged contacts in Ormaie—more accurately they are all different members of the same circuit. It is meant to work like a relay race with Julie as the baton, but she has missed out the first leg of the race, the connection at this end—probably due to coming down in the wrong place in the dark.

Must get in the habit of calling her Verity. Everyone else does. Her circuit is called Damask, after their most venerable member, who is 83 years old and a rose grower—they generally label circuits by some trade. I haven't been told the rose grower's name. No one goes by, or even knows, real names. I wouldn't want to give Julie's name away by accident.

Her assignment is so dead secret that her first contact wasn't told she and her goods had arrived until she'd told him herself, so although he was aware there had been a Lysander crash outside Ormaie, he hadn't known she'd survived until he met her—and when she spoke to him, neither one of them knew that the explosives landed safely as well. But word is spreading through the circuit that both Julie Verity *and* the explosives are here. Next stop the town hall. She is supposed to get access to

the city archives and look up the original architect's drawings for the old hotel building that the Ormaie Gestapo use as their headquarters. She won't be able to do that till we sort out her ID, though.

We are puzzling over how to do it. Mitraillette is not allowed to speak directly to Julie's Verity's contact, so she has to find someone else to take the message. They keep their tasks and names very carefully separated. And we don't want to hand over Verity's "Katharina Habicht" papers to anyone but Verity, i.e. "Katharina" herself. Mitraillette is going to try to arrange for V to pick them up from one of the Resistance "*cachettes*," their secret letter boxes. That means we have to pass word along somehow.

I say "we" as though I were going to do something dramatic to help, other than sit here blowing on my fingers to keep them warm and hoping no one finds me!

The operation is to go ahead as planned—they've got the equipment, they've got Verity, the contacts are all in place. With a little care and planning it'll be the Ormaie Gestapo HQ that goes up like Vesuvius, and not this barn. If only Käthe Habicht weren't operating "behind enemy lines," as it were, with Kittyhawk's British identity papers!

I am beginning to think it was one of her less clever ideas to call herself Kitty Hawk in German. Terribly sweet, but not very practical. Though to be fair she wasn't expecting me to come along.

Have taken Paul's revolver apart and put it back together 7 times. It is not as interesting as a radial engine.

Another Lysander has come down.

Unbelievable but true. This one made it past the antiaircraft guns and came in just as planned, easy peasy, about 70 miles north of here, on Mon. 18 Oct. unfortunately the landing field had become a sea of mud because there has been nothing but rain, rain, rain for the past week, all over France I think. The reception committee at the field up there spent five hours trying to haul the plane out of the mud—they hitched a pair of *bulls* to it, as it was too muddy even to drive a tractor onto the field, but finally had to give up as it was about to get light. So they have destroyed another aircraft and there is another Special Duties pilot stuck here.

I say another, but of course I am not really Special Duties. There's some small comfort in not being the only one—mean and piggy of me, I know, but I can't help it.

There had been talk of trying to get me out of here on that plane. They were going to try to squeeze me in with the two people I was supposed to have airlifted back to England in the first place—I'd have had to sit on the floor, but SOE and ATA are rather frantic about me at home and want me out of here. It hasn't happened. Any number of things need to be arranged, then rearranged, then go wrong at the last minute. Every message to London has to be laboriously encoded and delivered on a bicycle to a hidden wireless set 10 miles from here. The message perhaps doesn't get sent straight away because someone has disturbed the leaf in the keyhole or the eyelash folded in the note left for the courier, and then they have to wait three days to make sure they are not being watched. The rain has been dreadful, with cloud at 1000 feet and visibility next to nothing in the river valleys where the mist hangs—no one could land here anyway. No field closer than Tours, 50 miles away, to replace the one I ruined.

They call a ruined field *brûlé*—burnt. Which mine is.

They will have to send a Hudson to collect us all, as there just isn't the room in a Lysander. And that will mean waiting for the mud to dry out.

Ugh! I have never been so damp and miserable for such a

long time—it is like living in a tent with no light, no heat. They pile the goose feather quilts and sheepskin in with me, but the rain is constant—gray, heavy autumnal rain that stops you doing anything, even if you weren't trapped in a crawl space under the eaves. I have been down a few times—they try to give me a meal in the farmhouse each day to warm me up and break the monotony. Haven't written anything here for a week, as my fingers are starting to get chilblained—so dead cold always. I need those mittens I made out of the pattern book Gran gave me, with the flaps that flip back so you can use your fingers. *Essentials for the Forces*, that book was called. If I'd known *how essential* those mittens would be now, I'd never have taken them out of my flight bag—except to wear them. Not like the flipping gas mask.

I wish I was a writer—I wish I had the words to describe the rich mixture of fear and boredom that I have lived with for the past 10 days, and which putters on indefinitely ahead of me. It must be a little like being in prison. Waiting to be sentenced—not waiting for execution, as I'm not without hope. But the possibility that it will end in death is there. And real.

In the meantime my days are duller than a lifetime as a mill girl endlessly loading shuttles—nothing to do but suck on my cold fingers, like Jamie in the North Sea, and worry. I am not used to it. I am always doing, always at work on something. I don't know how to occupy my mind without my whole self being busy. The other girls at Maidsend all lay snoring or knitting or doing their nails when the rain was tipping it down in such grotty visibility no one could fly. Knitting was never enough. Got so bored with it, can't concentrate on anything bigger than socks or gloves. I always ended up scrounging bicycles to go exploring.

Remember the Bicycle Adventure when I told Julie all my fears—they seem so trivial now. The quick, sudden terror of exploding bombs is not the same as the never-ending, bone-sapping fear of discovery and capture. It never goes away. There isn't ever any relief, never the possibility of an All Clear siren. You always feel a little bit sick inside, knowing the worst might happen at any moment.

I said I was afraid of cold. It's true cold is uncomfortable

but...not really something to be afraid of, is it? What are 10 things I am afraid of now?

1) FIRE.

Not cold or dark. There is still a great pile of Explosive 808 hidden under the hay bales on the floor of this barn. The smell is overwhelming sometimes. It's like marzipan. Just can't forget it's there. If a German sentry poked his nose in here I don't know how he'd not notice it.

It makes me dream I'm eternally rolling icing for fruitcakes, believe it or not.

2) Bombs dropping on my gran and grandad. That hasn't changed.

3) Bombs dropping on Jamie. In fact I worry about Jamie a good deal more now that I've experienced a little of what he's up against.

4) New to this list: the Nazi concentration camps. Don't know any of their names, don't know where they are—I suppose I haven't been paying attention. They were never very real. Grandad roaring about ominous stories in the *Guardian* didn't make them real. But knowing I may very likely end up in one is more frightening than any news story could ever be. If they catch me and they do not shoot me right away, they will slap a yellow star on me and ship me out to one of these dreadful places and no one will ever know what happened to me.

5) COURT-MARTIAL.

I'm trying to remember what else I told Julie I was afraid of. Most of those "fears" we talked about that first day, in the canteen, were just so stupid. Getting old! It embarrasses me to think about it. The things I told her on our bicycle adventure were better. Dogs. Hah—that reminds me.

6) Paul. I had to chase him out of here at gunpoint—it was of course his own gun, the one he gave me and taught me to use. Perhaps I was overly dramatic to pull the gun on him. But he had actually come up into my loft, on his own in broad daylight, without any of the family knowing he was here, which is dead alarming of itself. They are so careful about keeping track of who comes and goes, and they need to trust him. I suppose all he wanted was a kiss and a cuddle. He backed off

looking deeply injured and left me feeling guilty and dirty and prudish all at once.

It frightened me terribly, more afterward when I thought about it than at the time. If he—or anyone—tried to force himself on me, I couldn't run away. I couldn't call for help. I'd have to endure it without a fight, and in silence, or risk giving myself up to the Nazis.

I lay awake in a funk nearly all night with Paul's dratted gun in my hand, my ear pressed to the trapdoor listening, expecting him to come back and try again under cover of darkness. As if he hasn't got better things to do under cover of darkness! Finally I fell asleep and dreamed there was a German soldier battering at the trapdoor. As he broke through I shot him in the face. Woke up gasping in horror—then fell asleep and had the same dream again and again, at least three times in a row. Every single time, I thought, That was a dream, earlier, but **THIS TIME** it's real.

When Mitraillette turned up to bring me my breakfast ration of bread and onions and their dreadful pretend coffee, I blurted out the whole sordid story. In English, of course. I finished by bursting into tears. She was sympathetic but confused. Not sure how much she understood and don't think there's anything she can do about it anyway.

"In English of course" leads me to Fear Number 7—being English. I think I told Julie I was afraid of getting my uniform wrong and people laughing at my accent, and I suppose in a sense I am still worried about these things—with better reason. My clothes! Mitraillette's don't fit me in the waist and hips. I have to wear a frock belonging to her mum—outmoded and severe, a thing no self-respecting girl of my generation would be caught dead in. Mitraillette's pullover does fit, and I have a many-times patched-over wool jacket that once belonged to her brother, but the combination of these warm outer garments and the dowdy frock looks dead weird. The outfit is completed with *wooden clogs*—just like Gran's gardener wears at home. There is no hope of better equipping me unless we use Julie's clothing coupons. I don't mind not being stylish, but I am obviously wearing an odd collection of cast-offs, and if I am seen, people will wonder.

And my “accent”! Well.

Mitraillette says she can tell by the WAY I WALK that I am not from Ormaie. If I walked to the corner shop dressed in the height of fashion and didn’t breathe a word to anyone, I would still betray myself and everyone around me. I am so afraid of letting them down.

Oh, yes, letting people down. Is this next lot fear or guilt? It feels like a lump of granite stuck in the gears of my brain and stripping them raw. Letting people down. A great circular list of failure and worry. What if I’m caught and give away the location of the RAF Moon Squadron? I’ve already let down every one of those Lysander pilots—who liked and encouraged me so much they were daft enough to let me take one of their planes to France. Special Operations Executive trusted me, too, not to mention the refugees I was supposed to pick up here. I’m a colossal failure as far as my own ATA ferry pool is concerned, done a bunk and AWOL indefinitely, and I dread betraying my hosts by accident—by being found on their property—or by being caught and giving them away under pressure. Don’t really believe I could keep anything from the Gestapo if they got to work on me. Oh, help—here I am again, back to the location of the Moon Squadron and the Gestapo.

Everything leads to the Ormaie Gestapo. Well, they can be Fear Number 9. The Nazi secret police, something else it makes me sick to think about. I am fairly certain the Ormaie Gestapo HQ will be my first stop on my way to whatever prison I end up in.

Unless the Ormaie Gestapo HQ is blown to bits first. But that doesn’t seem likely to happen any time soon. It is 10 days since we got here. Part of the reason I’ve not written since last week is because I don’t want to put to paper what I am about to write, don’t want to give any kind of reality to this ugly “perhaps.” Also, if I’d let myself write this week I’d have just wasted half my paper listing possibilities and wondering. It’s been too long. It is torment, pure torment, waiting for news—for anything.

Julie has vanished.

It’s true she made her first meeting—Tues. 12 Oct., the day after we got here, but then she simply disappeared as if she’d

never been in France. Today's the 21st. She's been missing over a week.

I understand now why her mother plays Mrs. Darling and leaves the windows open in her children's bedrooms when they're away. As long as you can pretend they might come back, there's hope. I don't think there can be anything worse in the world than not knowing what's happened to your child—not ever knowing.

Here, it happens all the time. It happens all the time—people just disappear, entire families sometimes. No one ever hears of them again. They vanish. Shot-down pilots, of course, torpedoed sailors, of course, you expect that. But here in France it happens to ordinary people, too. The house next door just turns up empty one morning, or the post office clerk doesn't show up for work, or your friend or your teacher doesn't come to school. I suppose there was a time, a couple of years ago, when there was a chance they'd run away to Spain or Switzerland. And even now there is a narrow hope that Julie has gone to ground until some unknown danger passes. But more often than not the missing face has been sucked into the engines of the Nazi death machine, like an unlucky lapwing hitting the propeller of a Lancaster bomber—nothing left but feathers blowing away in the aircraft's wake, as if those warm wings and beating heart had never existed.

There is no public record of the arrests. They happen every day. Often people look the other way if there is a fight in the street, to avoid getting in trouble themselves.

Julie has vanished.

It shocks me to write it, to see it here in the margin of my ATA Pilot's Notes alongside "De Havilland Mosquito—Engine Failure After Take-Off." But it's true. She has vanished. She may already be dead.

I'm afraid I will be caught. I'm afraid Julie is dead. But of all the things I'm afraid of, there's nothing that frightens me so much as the likelihood—the near certainty—that Julie is a prisoner of the Ormaie Gestapo.

It made my spine crawl as I wrote it down and it makes me shiver again to read the words I just wrote.

Must stop. This ink is amazing, it really doesn't smear even when you cry on it.

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Verity, Verity, must remember to call her Verity. Bother.

They can't move forward—no inside contacts yet. With Julie out of the picture, everything's stalled. She's supposed to be the central link in this operation, the informer, the German-speaking translator moving between the town hall and the Gestapo HQ. Mitraillette can't do it—she's local, too suspicious. Now the whole Damask Circuit is on edge, afraid that Julie's capture will betray them.

I mean, that Julie will betray them herself. By giving them away under pressure. The longer the silence the more certain it is that she's been caught.

Meanwhile, they're still trying to do something about me. It's been over two weeks—nothing's changed.

Had my photograph taken. It will be a while before the exposures are developed. Difficult setting me up with the trusted photographer, who's busy on many fronts. Most of the negotiating didn't involve me. Again, they've gone to a good deal of effort on my behalf—could tell how nervous Mitraillette's Maman was about having me and the photographer and Paul all gathered in her sitting room.

The idea is to do over Verity's false *carte d'identité* to turn Kittyhawk—I mean me—into Käthe, I mean Katharina Habicht. I would become the family's quiet and not-too-bright cousin from Alsace, whose parents have been bombed out and who has come here to be looked after and help with the farm. It's a risk for countless reasons, the worst being that there's always a possibility that if Julie has been caught, she may have already compromised the name. We've talked and talked about it—Mitraillette, Maman, and Papa, me as chief consultant and Paul as translator. If the Nazis have got Verity, we've to assume 1) they've also got Margaret Brodatt's pilot's license and National Registration card and already know MY real name, and 2) Julie's told them *her own* real name, because as an enlisted officer under the Geneva Convention that's what she's supposed to do and it's her best chance of being treated decently as a prisoner of war. We don't think she'll tell them the name on the forged Katharina Habicht *carte d'identité*. Paul doesn't think they're likely to ask, and even if they did, she could tell them

anything and they wouldn't know the difference. She could make up a name—she would, too. Or perhaps give them Eva Seiler.

But the real reason she won't tell them Käthe Habicht's name is because she knows that if I landed safely, it is the only identity I have.

The photographer works "for the enemy," too. Proper British airmen flying over the European Continent carry a couple of photographs in their emergency kit, just in case they're shot down and need fake ID. But my photographs are being taken by an official Gestapo-employed French photographer! One of his other jobs is developing enlarged pictures of my crash—he brought some of the prints to show us. Impossible to describe the dual thrill and dread in watching him undo the string fastener of his cardboard folder, then slide free the glossy paper—paper destined for the desk of the Gestapo captain in Ormaie. Like feeling the buffet of the first shadow fingers of cool air touch your wings, as the storm cloud you've been trying to outrun begins to catch up with you. This is how close I am to the Ormaie Gestapo—the photographer could hand me over with the pictures.

He warned me in English, "Not nice to look at."

The most disturbing thing was knowing it was meant to be me. That terrible charred corpse was wearing my clothes, bone and leather fused into the shattered cockpit in my place. ATA wings still tracing a pale outline on the sunken wreck of the breastbone. There was a blown-up detail of the ghostly wings, just the wings—you couldn't tell it was an ATA crest in particular.

I didn't like it. Why focus on the pilot's badge—just...Why?

"What is this for?" I asked. I could just about manage the French. "What will they do with these photographs?"

"There is an English airman being held in Ormaie," the photographer explained. "They want to show him these pictures, ask him questions about them."

They shot down a British bomber this week. In decent weather we get swarms of Allied aircraft flying over every night, and some in daylight, too. Think we've stopped bombing

Italy since the Allied invasion last month, but now that Italy's declared war on Germany, things are really heating up. We're too far from Ormaie to hear the sirens unless the wind is in the right direction. But you can see the sky flashing when the gunners on the ground fire at the passing planes.

That was me holding tight to the close-up print of my burnt wings, trying to figure it out. It's the least horrific of the pictures of the fake pilot, but it's the one that disturbed me the most. Finally I looked up at Paul.

"What's a captured lad from a bomber crew going to know about a wrecked reconnaissance aircraft?"

He shrugged. "You tell me. You're the pilot."

The sheet of glossy paper shook in my hand.

I stopped that straight away. Fly the plane, Maddie.

"You think their captured English airman might be Verity?"

Paul shrugged again. "She's not an airman."

"Nor English," I added.

"But she's probably carrying your English pilot's license and National Registration card," Paul pointed out quietly. "There aren't any photographs on your British ID, right? You're a civilian. So even if they know your name they won't know what you look like. Tell me, Kittyhawk, how convincing do you think these pictures are? Would you recognize yourself? Would anyone else?"

That melted corpse was hardly even recognizable as a human being. But those ATA wings... Oh, I don't want Julie to see these pictures and be told she's looking at me.

Because she knows the plane. There's no denying it's the same plane—the markings are still visible, R 3892. I just—can't think about this, Julie in prison, being made to look at these pictures.

I said to Paul, "Ask the photographer how long he can stall before he has to turn these in."

The photographer understood me without needing a translation.

"I wait," he said. "The Gestapo captain will wait. The pictures were not good when I made them, perhaps, not clear

enough, and need to be made over again. It will take a long time. The Englishman must tell the captain of other things. He will not see the pictures of the pilot yet. We can give them these others to begin—”

He pulled more glossy sheets from the folder and held one out to me. It was the inside of the rear cockpit, loaded with the ashly remains of “*onze radios*”—eleven “wireless sets.”

I gasped with laughter. Beastly of me, I know, but it is a BRILLIANT photograph—totally convincing. It is the best thing I have seen in the last two weeks. If they have got Julie and they show her that picture, it will be a gift. She will make up an operator and a destination for every single one of those phony radios, and the frequencies and code sets to go with it. She will lead them blind.

“*Oui, mais oui*, oh, yes!” I stuttered, a bit too hysterically, and everybody frowned at me. I handed both photos back—the one that will break Julie and the one that could save her. “Give them these.”

“Good—” said the photographer, cool and neutral. “Good, it will make less trouble for me if some of the prints are produced on time.” I am so—just dead humbled by the risks everybody takes, the double lives they all lead, how they shrug and go on working. “Now we take your picture, Mademoiselle Kittyhawk.”

Maman made a fuss over me and tried to make my hair pretty. Hopeless. The photographer took three shots and began to laugh.

“Your smile is too big, mam’selle,” he said. “In France, we do not like these identity cards. Your face must be—neutral, *oui*? Neutral. Like the Swiss!”

Then we all laughed, a bit nervously, and I think I ended up glaring. I do try to smile at everybody—it is one of the only things I know about being undercover in enemy-occupied territory. That and how to fire a revolver using the “Double Tap.”

Can’t begin to say how much I hate Paul.

The photographer had also brought me a pair of lined woolen climbing slacks belonging to his wife, good ones, well-

made and not much used, which he gave to me after he put away his equipment. I was so surprised and grateful I started to blub again. The poor man took this the wrong way and apologized for not bringing a prettier dress! Maman descended on me, mopping my tears with her apron with one hand, showing how warm and thick the slacks are with the other. She worries about me a good deal.

Paul turned to the photographer and made a remark in a matey undertone, as though they were sharing a pint in a pub. But he said it in English so that I could understand it, and no one else would except the photographer.

“Kittyhawk won’t mind trousers. What she’s got between her legs she doesn’t use anyway.”

I hate him.

I know he is the organizer, the keystone of this Resistance circuit. I know my life depends on him. I know I can trust him to get me out of here. But I still hate him.

The photographer gave Paul an embarrassed chuckle—man to man, jolly saucy joke—and gave me a sideways glance to see if I got it—but of course I was blubbing away in Maman’s large French farmhouse embrace and looked like I probably hadn’t heard. And I pretended that I hadn’t, because it was more important that I thank the photographer properly than that I tackle Paul.

HATE HIM.

After the photographer left I had to go have another target practice session with Paul. He STILL doesn’t keep his hands to himself—even after being told off at gunpoint, even with Mitraillette watching—doesn’t let them stray, but just leaves them on your arm or shoulder for much too long. He must know how much I’d like to blow his brains out with his own gun. But he obviously thrives on danger, and despite my violent dreams I don’t really have it in me. Expect he knows that too.

The last weekend in every month Maman is permitted to kill a specially authorized chicken so she can produce Sunday dinner for half a dozen Gestapo officers. Because of Etienne being local, his family has to entertain his superiors pretty regularly, and of course the Nazis know the food is better on the farm than in town. I spent the whole three hours of their last visit gripping my Colt .32 so tightly that four days later my hand is still stiff. By squinting sideways through the slats in the barn wall I could just make out the bonnet of their gleaming Mercedes-Benz where they left it parked in the courtyard, and got a glimpse of the hem of the captain's long leather coat, which caught on the fender as they got back in.

It was La Cadette, the little sister, who told me about the visit. La Cadette is really called Amélie. Seems a bit daft not to write the family's names now, as the Nazis are so familiar with them anyway. But I've come to think of the Thibauts as simply Maman and Papa, and I can't think of Mitraillette as Gabrielle-Thérèse any more than I can think of Julie as Katharina. The family lets Amélie do most of the talking when the Nazis occupy their kitchen—she appears to have a head full of feathers but utterly charms the visitors with her fluent Alsatian German. Everybody likes her.

They try to make this monthly visit informal—everyone wearing civilian clothes, though they all defer to the Gestapo captain as if he were the King of England. Both Mitraillette and her sister agree he's dead scary—calm and soft-spoken—never says anything without consideration. About the same age as Papa Thibaut, the farmer. His subordinates all live in terror of him. The captain doesn't make favorites of anyone, but he likes talking to Amélie, and brings her a small gift every time he comes. This time it was a matchbook embossed with the crest of the hotel they've taken over for their offices—C d B, Château de Bordeaux. Amélie has passed it on to me. It's sweet of her but I'm not keen to set fire to anything in here!

They start with drinks. The men all stand about the kitchen sipping cognac, La Cadette serving, Mitraillette sitting awkwardly in a corner with the sullen German lass who gets dragged everywhere as the captain's secretary/valet/slave girl—

she's also their driver. Doesn't take cognac with the men, as her hands are full holding the captain's file folder and gloves and hat during all the small talk.

Today the brother, Etienne, had a great big ugly lump on his forehead over his left eye—quite fresh, a purple bruise with a bloody dent in the center, still swollen. La Cadette was all over him with sympathy, Maman and Mitraillette a bit more restrained. They didn't dare ask how he got it—well, his little sister did dare, but he wouldn't tell her. He was also thoroughly embarrassed by the attention, the fuss being made in front of his boss and two colleagues and the other girl too.

So La Cadette turns to the captain and asks, "Does Etienne spend the whole working day scrapping with people? He might as well be back in school!"

"Your brother's very well-behaved," the captain answers. "But sometimes a vicious prisoner reminds us how dangerous a policeman's work can be."

"Is your work dangerous too?"

"No," he tells her blandly. "I have a desk job. All I do is talk to people."

"Vicious prisoners," she points out.

"That's why I have your brother to guard me."

At this point the slave-girl secretary sniggers very, very quietly behind her hand—pretending to clear her throat and making a sketchy wave at Etienne's bruised head—and she murmurs to Mitraillette beside her, "A woman did that."

"Did he deserve it?" Mitraillette whispers back.

The secretary shrugs.

It is HELL not knowing what has happened, or what is happening to Julie. More than three weeks now, already into November. Complete silence—she might as well be on the dark side of the moon. Incredible what slender threads you begin to hang your hopes on.

They don't interrogate many women in Ormaie—usually send them straight to prison in Paris, I think. I am sure my heart actually stopped for a second when I heard it, and again writing

it down.

“A woman did that.”

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Don't know whether I'm disappointed or relieved—spent most of yesterday (Sun. 7 Nov.) trying to get out of France, and now I'm back here in the same old barn—exhausted but whizzing, I'm able to write because it's getting light already and Paul gave me a Benzedrine tablet last night to keep me going.

Glad to have these notes back. I left them here so as not to have them on me if I was caught during the 50 mile trek to the landing field. Of course as I've told myself a million times I shouldn't be making the blasted notes in the first place, but I think I'll take them with me next time. Felt a bit like I was pulling myself apart to leave them here, and it's a treasonable offense to lose my Pilot's Notes.

Rode in the boot of a small auto belonging to a chum of Papa Thibaut's, a Citroën Rosalie—4-cylinder engine, at least 10 years old, running—just—on a disgusting mix of coal tar and sugar-beet ethanol. Poor engine hates it—coughing and spluttering the whole way—suppose I'm lucky I didn't asphyxiate in the exhaust. Papa Thibaut has got a delivery van of his own for the farm, but it and his driver are so carefully regulated that they don't dare use them for Resistance activity. On yesterday's trip, a Sunday afternoon, there were no less than six checkpoints to get through, more than one every 10 miles. They don't always know where the checkpoints will be, and it was a good means to find out so we could avoid them on the way home after curfew. I was in the back with a wicker picnic hamper and also a couple of chickens—laying hens—which were legitimately being taken to another farm. The fuss made over the chickens at the checkpoints is not to be believed. Unlike me, they had their own papers.

Dead clever distraction, though. As soon as anyone opened the boot, which they did at half the checkpoints, the chickens began to carry on like—well, like chickens! The difficulty for me, curled at the back of the boot under empty feed sacks, was not in trying to avoid heart failure every time somebody looked in on us but in managing not to give myself away with hysterical laughter.

It took ages to get to the landing field—getting dark when we arrived, minus hens, which had been dropped off at their

final destination. I had to wait in my hiding place for nearly an hour while the hen transaction was completed, but they saved a sandwich and a drop of cognac for me. Then on to the field, bit of an uphill slope but not too bad, unfortunately some high power cables in the approach that I didn't like the look of at all, and ultimately neither did the pilot who didn't land there—I'll get to that—

In addition to me and the hens, our carload included Papa Thibaut's friend the driver, Papa Thibaut for authenticity of chicken sales, Amélie and Mitraillette for authenticity of Sunday picnic, and Paul for general knowledge and execution of plan. Paul sat between the girls the whole way with Amélie purring on his shoulder. She is a wizard actress, La Cadette. under the backseat they had hidden a couple of Stens—Mitraillette's namesake submachine gun—and a wireless set. The field was right up at the end of a dirt track, three wooden gates to open and shut on the way—"guards" of our own posted on each gate already. They'd all arrived on bicycles, hidden in the wayside shrubs now—a few of the riders had doubled up so that when the aircraft passengers left, there wouldn't be extra cycles to take back with them. The local "ground crew" set up our radio by attaching it to the poor Rosalie's battery and sticking the antenna up a tree that conveniently hid the car from the air, as well. Reception was all right at first, though as the wind picked up later it got more and more difficult to hear anything.

We crowded 'round the headset as the BBC came on air, two or three of us to an earphone—

—ICI LONDRES—

THIS IS LONDON! Such a thrill, no other word for it, THRILLING, to hear the BBC—just incredible. How amazing, *astonishing* it is that we have this technology, this link—all the hundreds of miles between us, field and forest and river and sea, all the guards and guns, bypassed in an eye blink. And then that moderate voice, speaking clear French that even I could understand, as though the chap were standing next to you, secretly telling you in your blacked-out European field that your

rescue plane is On The Way!

Paul introduced all the lads of the reception committee—not by their real names, of course. You have to shake hands with *everyone*. Hard to remember them all after one meeting in the dark. There was a girl who was supposed to be picked up with us, a wireless operator, they were dead keen to get her back to England as she has apparently got half the Gestapo in Paris on her tail.

“Don’t know what we’ll do without you, Princess,” Paul said, squeezing her around the waist.

“I’ll come back,” she said quietly. Not like Julie at all, really—shy and soft-spoken. Must be every bit as brave, though. Can’t imagine what nerve these people must have.

Then Paul pointed out to me, “That young fellow just coming with the last bicycle is the other pilot, the one who got stuck in the mud west of here. You probably know each other?”

I looked up. It was Jamie, JAMIE BEAUFORT-STUART. Even in tossing shadows and under a waxing moon I knew him, and he saw me at the same time. He dropped his bicycle and we leaped for each other like kangaroos. He burst out, “MA—”

He nearly said my name. He caught himself and stammered a little, then smoothly cried out, “*MA CHÉRIE!*” and slung me over backward in a swooning Hollywood kiss.

We both came up gasping for air.

“Sorry, sorry!” he hissed in my ear. “First thing I thought of—didn’t want to blow your cover, Kittyhawk! Won’t do it again, I promise—”

Then we were both overcome with silliness, giggling like idiots. I kissed him back very quickly, so that he knew I didn’t mind. He swooped me upright but kept one arm over my shoulder—they are all like that, those Beaufort-Stuarts, affectionate as puppies, dead casual about it. It’s not British! Not English, anyway, but I don’t think it’s very Scottish, either. For a moment I saw Paul watching us, himself with one arm still clamped around the other girl’s waist—then he turned away and said something to one of the landing team.

“Any word from our Verity?” Jamie asked suddenly.

I shook my head, didn’t quite trust myself to answer.

“Bloody hell,” he muttered.

“I’ll tell you Paul’s long shot—”

We went to sit in the car with Amélie, who had fallen blissfully asleep on the backseat. Mitraillette was perched on the bonnet with one of the Sten guns propped on her knees, keeping a good lookout as usual. It would be a couple of hours before the plane arrived—the reception committee were laying out the flare path—electric torches tied to sticks. Nothing for us to do but wait and watch till it was time to turn on the lights.

“The long shot?” Jamie prompted.

“There’s a woman in Paris who announces a radio program aimed at the Yanks,” I told Jamie. “Paul’s asked her if she can interview the Ormaie Gestapo, perhaps include some propaganda supporting them in her show—let the American boys on the battleships know how unfeeling it is of us to use innocent girls as spies, and how well the Germans treat them when they catch them. The broadcaster’s called Georgia Penn —”

“God, doesn’t she announce that sickening ‘No Place Like Home’ for Third Reich Radio or whatever they call it? I thought she was a Nazi!”

“She’s—” I couldn’t think of the right word—except “double agent,” which isn’t what I meant, though I suppose that’s what she really is. “She’s not a courier, she doesn’t carry messages—Who’s the person a king sends ahead of his army and expects won’t get killed?”

“A herald?”

“That’s it exactly!” I should remember. It’s the name of the American paper she used to work for.

“What’s she going to do for us while she’s pulling off this positive Nazi propaganda campaign in Ormaie?”

“Try to find Verity,” I said softly.

That’s what this woman does, this mad American broadcaster, though her wages get paid by the Nazi Minister of Propaganda in Berlin—she walks bold as brass into prisons and prison camps and finds people. Sometimes. Sometimes she’s refused entry. Sometimes she’s too late. Too often the people she’s looking for just can’t be found. But she tries. She gets let in

as entertainment for the imprisoned soldiers, and comes out with information. And she hasn't been caught yet.

Dratted wind. Still howling all over France—a beautiful day otherwise, for once.

Well—the plane got there, finally, one of the Moon Squadron Lizzies—lovely familiar ducky fuselage and itty-bitty hawklike wings—would have been a tight fit with the three of us in the back, but we'd have made it, none of us very big—anyway, it didn't land. Gusts must have been 40 knots, blowing crosswind over the landing strip, pylons to tangle with in the approach, batteries dying on the electric torches we were using to light the flare path—finally Paul and Jamie and I had to stand there switching the lights off whenever the pilot climbed away, and back on as he started another circuit of the field. The chap circled overhead for three quarters of an hour and tried to come down half a dozen times before finally bottling out. Suppose it's a bit mean to say he “bottled out,” anyone with half a brain would have done the same and I don't think I'd have stuck around as long as he did. The moon set about 4:00 a.m. today and it must have been down by the time he got back to England.

Jamie and I knew he wouldn't make it in. Still—I was desolated when he climbed away and headed back west. We stood watching, faces to the sky in the dark and fingers gripping the torch switches, only a few seconds, and then we couldn't see a thing of course—but we could hear the familiar engine throbbing for a minute or two as it faded into the distance.

Like the end of *The Wizard of Oz* when the balloon goes off without Dorothy. I didn't mean to, couldn't help it, let out an enormous babyish sob as we trudged back across the field. Just seem to howl at *anything*. When we reached the car Jamie took hold of the back of my head and pressed my face against his shoulder to shut me up.

“Shhh.”

I did stop, out of shame mostly, because the hunted wireless girl was being so stoic about it.

Had to pack everything up and head back the way we'd all come—we refugees to our different hiding places, and now of

course it was well past curfew and we didn't have the chickens to bluff with this time. Started bawling *again* when I had to say good-bye to Jamie.

"Now stop. You go back to Ormaie and look after Verity."

I know he is dead sick with worry about her too and was being brave to make me brave, so I nodded. He wiped my cheeks with his thumbs.

"Good girl. Buck up, Kittyhawk! Not like you to blub."

"Just feel so *useless*," I sobbed. "Hiding all day, everyone rushing around me risking their lives, waiting on me all the time, sharing food when they have to account for every missing crumb, can't even wash my own panties—and what'll happen when I do get home? They'll probably send me to prison anyway for hoodwinking my C.O., nicking an RAF plane and dumping it in France—"

"They will grill us all and we will all defend you. They've not stopped any of us flying—they're desperate for Moon pilots. You only did what you were told."

"I know what they'll say. Silly girl, no brains, too soft, can't trust a woman to do a man's work. They only let us fly operational aircraft when they get desperate. And they're always harder on us when we botch something." All true, and what I said next was true too, but a bit petty—"You even get to keep your BOOTS and mine are BURNT."

Jamie burst out laughing. "It's not because I'm a lad that they let me keep my boots," he said, with just as much outrage in his voice as I must have had in mine. "Only because I haven't any toes!"

That got a little choking laugh out of me at last.

Jamie kissed me lightly on the forehead. "You've got to look for Julie," he whispered. "You know she's counting on you."

Then he called out softly, "Oi, Paul! I want a word with you!" Jamie kept one arm lovingly around my waist—so like his sister. Paul came close to us in the dark.

"used this field before?" Jamie demanded.

"For parachute drops."

“The pylons are always going to be a problem for landing, even without the crosswind. Listen, old chap, if you can risk taking Kittyhawk about in daylight a bit more, she’s your best bet for field selection around Ormaie. She’s a cracking good pilot-navigator and a reasonable mechanic too.”

Paul was silent for a moment.

“Aircraft mechanic?” he asked finally.

“And motorbikes,” I said.

Another moment of silence.

Then, casually, Paul asked, “Explosives?”

I hadn’t even thought about it. But—well, why not? That’s a brilliant thing to put my idle mind to work on: making a bomb.

“Not yet,” I answered cautiously.

“Tough work for a slip of a lass—are you willing to risk it, Kittyhawk?”

I nodded like an eager puppy.

“Let’s get those papers made for you and let you off the leash a bit while you wait for the next flight out.” He turned back to Jamie, and spoke in that nudge-nudge-matey tone again as if I couldn’t hear, as if I were deaf. “Bit of a dark horse, isn’t she, our Kittyhawk? Thought she didn’t like men. Ready to go like a stoat with you, though.”

Jamie let go of me. “*Shut your mucky gob, man.*” He stepped close to our fearless leader in the dark, took hold of his jacket by the collar, and in a dead quiet voice that had gone dangerously Scots, threatened heatedly, “Talk like that again wi’ these brave lassies listenin’ an’ Ah’ll tear the filthy English tongue frae yer heid, *so Ah will.*”

“All right, lad,” Paul said calmly, gently shaking Jamie loose. “Back down. We’re all a bit excited—”

What was left of Jamie’s slim hand looked perilously small in Paul’s firm grip, and Jamie in general is nowhere near as big as Paul—a bit like a ferret going after a Labrador. At this moment the air began to hum. Another plane was crabbing in as low as it could safely fly, two broad searchlight beams stretching and leaping toward the ground before and behind it.

Paul reacted first and pulled the wireless operator under the shrubs where the bicycles were hidden. The rest of us threw ourselves into the low ditch that was the field boundary. No part of last night seemed to last as long as those five minutes lying trapped and defenseless in frozen mud and dead grass, waiting for the Luftwaffe machine guns to drill us into the packed earth or pass us by.

Obviously, the plane passed by. It didn't linger over our field in particular, either—must have been on some kind of routine patrol—don't like to think what would have happened if it had done its flypast while we were loading up a Lysander.

It sobered everybody up.

We drove the refugees and anyone else who fitted back to within a mile or two of their safe house, 3 bicycles tied on the running boards and roof of the Rosalie, the motorcar absolutely jammed full with 3 of us in the front seat, 4 in the back, 2 in the boot, and me and the w/op riding on the rear bumper and hanging on to the roof like baby monkeys clinging to their mum—the idea being that if we were stopped, she and I would at least be able to jump down and make a run for it. No one else would stand a chance. It's marvelous, in a desperate kind of way, to opt for speed over subtlety—like screaming downhill to put out the fire when your aircraft's in flames.

Every time we came to a gate, the two of us jumped down to open and shut it and took flying leaps back onto the rear bumper as the Rosalie set off again.

"You're so fortunate to be in Damask," the wireless girl shouted at me as we clattered through the dark—no lights, not even those useless slitty blackout headlamps. Didn't need them with the moon nearly full, though. "Paul will take great care of you. And he'll do everything he can to find your missing agent—that will be a matter of pride for him. He's never lost any of his circuit before." Posh Southern English with a faint French accent. "My own circuit has collapsed—14 arrests made last week. Organizer, couriers, the lot—someone's leaking names. It's been sheer hell. I've been given to Paul for safekeeping—shame he's such a lech, but as long as you *know*—"

"I can't stand him!" I confessed.

“You have to ignore it. He doesn’t mean any harm. Close your eyes and think of England!”

We both laughed. Suppose we were a bit high—keyed up with the Benzedrine, rattling through the French countryside in the moonlight, people we love and work with disappearing around us like burnt-out sparklers. Hard to imagine how dead we’d have been ourselves if we’d met anyone—felt alive and unbeatable.

Don’t like to think of her being hunted. Hope she makes it out of France.

I am Katharina Habicht now. It's not nearly as frightening as I thought it would be—the change brings such tremendous improvements to daily living that the additional danger's nothing. Who cares? I couldn't become a bigger jangle of nerves than I already am.

I'm sleeping in Etienne's room now—"hiding in plain sight" taken to extremes. I've also nicked some of his stuff. We cleared out a drawer to make room for Käthe's under things and extra skirt—illegally scrounged with Julie's coupons. At the back of the drawer was a super Swiss pocketknife with a tin opener and screwdriver attachment, and this notebook—a school exercise jotter dated fifteen years ago. Etienne's written out a list of local birds on the first three pages. For a week in 1928 Etienne Thibaut decided he was going to be a nature enthusiast. Sort of thing you do when you're ten, about the age I took Gran's gramophone to bits.

The list of birds makes me sad. What changes a small boy from a bird-watcher into a Gestapo inquisitor?

No good place for me to hide things in this room—Etienne knows where all the hiding places are. Two loose floorboards and a niche beneath the windowsill and a hole in the plaster are all crammed with his Small Boy Stuff—he hasn't touched any of it for years, all of it dust-covered, but I'm sure he knows it's there. I am keeping this notebook and my Pilot's Notes IN the mattress—which I have slit with Etienne's own knife.

I have met him. Trial by fire for Käthe. Went cycling with Amélie and Mitraillette, my first sortie looking for landing fields—three girls on bicycles, you know, having a jolly afternoon out together, what could be more normal? My bicycle is the one that belonged to the sentry Paul shot when I landed here. It has been "remade." On our way back up the main road we met Etienne coming the other way, and of course he stopped to bait his sisters and find out who I am.

My evasive action consists of smiling like an idiot, hiding my face in my own shoulder as though I'm too shy to deserve to live, giggling a bit and mumbling. My French has not improved but they have taught me a few responses to greetings that I am allowed to give when I am directly addressed—then let

Mitraillette and her *cadette* sister do the rest of the talking for me. “She’s Mum’s cousin’s daughter from Alsace. Their house has been bombed and her mum’s been killed. She’s having a holiday with us till her dad finds a new place to live—she’s a bit fragile at the moment, doesn’t like to talk about it, you know?”

In an emergency they are supposed to say a code word, *MAMAN*, and speak directly to me in German. That’s the signal for me to burst into noisy tears, which the girls will respond to with equally noisy comfort and cooing—all in German. This performance is designed to shock and embarrass whoever is pestering us so deeply that they will quickly give us back our papers, without looking at mine too closely, and run the other direction to get away from us.

We’ve practiced this routine and made rather a fine art of it. And every morning since I moved into the house, La Cadette—Amélie—comes and bounces on my bed crying out, “Wake up, Käthe, come and feed the chickens!” Suppose it’s quite easy for them to remember my “name” as they’ve only ever known me as Kittyhawk anyway.

So—we met Etienne. And of course the *whole conversation* was carried on in German, because not only do they speak it at home with their mother, but as their cousin I’m expected to understand it too. Every ounce of strength in me was invested in listening for the code word mixed in among their talk, which might as well have been Glaswegian for all I could make out! My maidenly blushes were not phony—felt my face would catch fire with fear and embarrassment. I had to let the Thibaut girls do the hard work of covering for me, explaining me to their brother as a cousin he’d never heard of before.

But then Etienne and Amélie started scrapping, Amélie going whiter and whiter the more he talked—expect I did too, after a while—until I actually thought she was going to be sick, at which point Mitraillette snarled oaths at their turncoat brother and threatened to thump him. He went dead stiff, said something nasty to Mitraillette, and started off on his bicycle away from us. But then he stopped and turned and gave me a nod, dead polite and formal, before he cycled off.

When he was nowhere near in earshot anymore, Mitraillette burst out in English, “My brother is a SHIT.” Don’t

know where she learned that word—not from me! “He is a SHIT.” She said it again and switched to French, which was harder for me to understand but easier for her to swear in.

Etienne has been assisting at an interrogation. It is beginning to tell on him, and he took it out on Amélie, who had *again* poked fun at the fading bruise on his forehead. So he told her in hideous detail what would be done to her if she was a prisoner who refused to give answers when the Gestapo questioned her.

Can’t get it out of my head now that it’s in there.

I keep hearing it over and over in dribs and drabs from Amélie herself, who thinks I’m a good listener although I can’t understand half of what she says. She’s partly upset by the Gestapo captain’s involvement, as she puts him on the same shelf in her brain as her priest or the head of her school—someone in authority, a bit distant, mostly kind to her, but above all someone who plays strictly by the rules. Someone who *lives* by rules.

And forcing pins under a person’s toenails because they won’t talk to you doesn’t count as any rules that anyone has ever heard of.

“I don’t believe they’d do that to a woman,” Amélie told her brother as we stood in the road with our bicycles.

“The pins go in your breasts if you are a woman.”

That was when Amélie gulped and went green, and when Mitraillette got angry.

“Shut your trap, Etienne, you donkey. You’ll give the kids nightmares! God! Why the hell do you stay there if it’s so horrible? Does it make you excited, watching people stick pins in a woman’s breasts?”

That was when Etienne became cold and formal.

“I stay because it’s my job. No, it’s not exciting. No woman is attractive when you’re pouring ice water over her head to revive her and she’s managed to be sick in her own hair.”

I tell Amélie not to think about it. Then I tell myself not to think about it. Then I tell myself I *must* think about it. It is REAL. It is

happening NOW.

What Jamie said is giving me nightmares. If Julie is not already dead—if she is not already dead she is counting on me. She is calling me, whispering my name to herself in the dark. What can I do—I can scarcely sleep. I just go around in circles all night trying to think what I can do. WHAT can I do?

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Have found a super field—rather far from here, though—cycling all day with M., Fri. 12 Nov. Incredible how difficult it is to find a decent landing field for the SOE. It's all so samey, farm after farm, shrines at every crossroad and a community bread oven in every village. The fields are so flat you could land anything anywhere. But there are never any good nighttime landmarks or any kind of cover for a reception team. Must be lovely flying in peacetime.

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I have been in France five weeks now.

My legs are stronger than they've ever been—cycled a good sixty miles twice this week, once to find the field and again two days later to take Paul to see it. He needs to get his w/op to send an RAF plane to take pictures for Moon Squadron approval. In between marathon bicycle rides I spend most of my time taking care of chickens, learning how to wire up small explosive devices, and trying hard not to suddenly scream my head off with nerves.

The broadcaster Georgia Penn has had a “no” from the head of the Gestapo in this region—a powerful and terrible man called Ferber, I think, the Ormaie captain's boss. Penn has let us know she plans to ignore his refusal and try again by going straight to the captain—she'll backdate her application, tie them up in their own red tape, right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing. An amazing woman but totally crackers, if you ask me—hope her own right hand knows what her left hand is doing.

Another Lysander pickup is planned for tomorrow night, Tues. 16 Nov., at the same pylon-infested field near Tours. Weather unpredictable but it's the last chance before we lose the November moon. I may go home with my munitions expertise untested.

No, I am still here. Dratted Rosalie.

Can't blame the poor car, I suppose, but don't like to blame the stupid, well-meaning driver.

Oh, I'm tired. Moonrise at ten p.m. last night so plane not due in till two in the morning—Paul came to collect me after curfew and we bicycled to meet the car, him cycling and me riding behind him standing on a bar wedged through the frame. Had to cling to him for dear life for five miles. Bet he loved that. The car was late meeting us—the driver had to avoid an unexpected patrol—Paul and I stood for half an hour shivering and stamping around in the drainage ditch where we hid the bicycle. Don't know when my toes have *ever* been so cold, standing in icy mud, mid-November, in wooden clogs—thought so much of Jamie floating in the North Sea. I was nearly crying by the time the car arrived.

There were only three of us along for this trip—dangerous in both directions, didn't want to drag Papa Thibaut into it. His friend who owns the motorcar set off at top speed, full out and going like the clappers, no lights as usual except the waning gibbous moon on the rise. The Rosalie really did not want to go like the clappers and performed its usual consumptive drama every time we came to an uphill slope, coughing and gasping like a dying Dickens heroine, and finally just stopped—engine still gasping a bit but the car just *stopped*. Simply could not move forward up the hill. Choke full out but cylinders firing pathetically as though we were trying to make the poor thing run on nothing but air.

"Your choke's not working," I said from the backseat.

Of course the driver didn't understand me, and I didn't know the French for choke, and neither did Paul—*Le starter*, it turns out, which is not the same as the starter that might turn on your English engine. unbelievable confusion followed. Paul tried desperately to translate and the driver resisted taking advice from a Slip of a Lass or whatever the French is for Slip of a Lass, I'm sure the direct translation in any language is more or less "Featherbrain," as it's what I get called whenever I'm expected not to be able to do whatever it is—fly a plane, load a gun, make a bomb—fix a car—so we lost fifteen minutes

arguing.

Finally, as it was dead obvious that the choke *wasn't* working, the driver jiggled it about violently enough that something finally slid back into place and after a few healthier-sounding coughs the Rosalie reluctantly set off again.

This whole routine was repeated detail for detail three more times. FOUR TIMES IN TOTAL. The car stopped, I said the choke wasn't working, Paul tried to translate without success, we all argued for fifteen minutes, Papa Thibaut's friend jiggled the choke lever for a while, and finally the Rosalie wheezed into life and trundled off again.

We had now lost an hour, a solid hour, and I was *fuming*. So was the French driver, who was tired of being shouted at in English by a Slip of a Lass younger than his own daughter. Every time we moved off again Paul would reach back and give my knee a reassuring squeeze, till finally I thumped him and told him to keep his mucky hands to himself, so that even when the car was moving, we were all growling at one another like tomcats.

I was no longer afraid of being caught by the Nazis or worried that we'd be too late for the Lysander pickup—both of which were more and more likely the longer we were on the road. I was just mad as a hornet because I *knew* what was wrong with the car and they wouldn't let me do anything about it.

When the car stopped for the fifth time I climbed over Paul and got out.

"Don't be an idiot, Kittyhawk," he said through his teeth.

"I will WALK to this airfield," I said. "I know the coordinates and I have a compass. I will WALK there and if I am too late to meet the plane I will WALK back to Ormaie, but if you EVER want me to get in this French car, EVER AGAIN, you are going to have to make that French moron who is driving it open up the engine cowling so I can fix the choke RIGHT NOW."

"My God, we haven't time for that—we're an hour and a half late already—"

"OPEN THE COWLING OR I WILL SHOOT IT OPEN."

I didn't mean that. But it was an inspired threat, mostly because it gave me the idea of leveling my Colt .32 at the driver's head and making him get out of the car.

He didn't even turn the ignition off—the engine was still gasping as we pried up the side panel of the bonnet with the tin opener on Etienne's Swiss knife. All was inky pitch black beneath it. The driver cursed and complained but Paul murmured reassuring words to him in French, as I couldn't be stopped now. Got one of them to hold an electric torch for me while the other made a tent with his jacket to hide the light. Oh—the screw that held the cable to the choke valve had come loose—probably with all that blasted jiggling—the flap that is supposed to close over the air feed to the carburetor wasn't closing properly, and all I had to do was tighten the screw with my wizard pocket screwdriver nicked from the Nazis.

I slammed the bonnet shut, leaned in the driver's door and yanked the choke on, and the engine roared into life like a zooful of happy lions.

Then I climbed back into my maidenly spot in the backseat and didn't say anything else till we got to the field, half an hour after the plane had left. Most of the reception committee had left, too, only a couple of them still waiting for us to turn up in case something awful had happened to us.

I was too mad this time to think of Dorothy at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*. I gave the poor Rosalie such a kick in the front fender that I made a dent in it with my wooden clog. Everyone was shocked. Apparently I've got a reputation for being quiet and a bit weepy—in a word, they think I'm gormless.

Paul again, explaining: "They couldn't have waited—it's so late now it'll be daylight by the time they get back to England. They couldn't risk being caught over France in daylight."

Then I felt dead selfish and bossy and mean, and tried to apologize to Papa Thibaut's mate, in my rubbish French, for denting his fender.

"No, no, it is I who must thank you, mademoiselle"—says he, in French—"for you have mended my choke!" And he held the door open for me gallantly. No suggestion that he had

wasted yet another night risking his life for an ungrateful foreigner who would never be able to repay him—the Aerodrome Drop-Off Principle taken to extremes.

“Merci beaucoup, je suis désolée—” Thank you so much, I’m sorry, I’m sorry—seems like I’m always saying “Thank you, I’m sorry.”

One of the reception committee stuck his head into the car after me. “The Scottish airman said to give you these.”

Jamie left me his boots.

True to my reputation for gormlessness I blubbed most of the way back to Ormaie. But at least my feet were warm.

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Penn's found her. Georgia Penn's FOUND HER! Julie disappeared 13 Oct. and Penn talked to her yesterday, 19 Nov. NEARLY SIX WEEKS.

I don't recognize my emotions anymore. There's no such thing as plain joy or grief. It's horror and relief and panic and gratitude all jumbled together. Julie's alive—she's still in Ormaie—she's in one piece, in her usual battle gear, every elegant hair swept neatly into place two inches above her collar, she's even still managing to do her blooming nails somehow.

But she *is* a prisoner. They caught her almost immediately. She looked the wrong way before crossing the street. Typical Julie. Oh—I don't know whether to laugh or to cry. So fed up with crying all the time, but too upset to laugh. If she'd had the right ID on her when they first questioned her she might have got away with it. She didn't stand a chance without ID.

Miss Penn had asked if she could interview an English-speaker and they got to talk face-to-face, under guard, and Penn verified Julie by her code name. She wasn't told Julie's real name. Don't know what excuse they gave. Penn came away fairly well convinced the whole interview setup was a complete sham, and Julie herself was being kept on a tight rein somehow. Invisible, but there. I suppose Julie knew that if she stepped out of line they'd silence Penn too—I know Julie would never risk that. She didn't even go against orders and say her name. All information was passed in hints and code words. The captain and slave girl were both there, and one or two others, and they all sat around drinking cognac—except the slave girl, of course!—in the captain's dead-swanky office where Julie has been temporarily put to work as a translator. So in fact she's actually doing what she was sent here to do!

No name given, no military service or rank mentioned—she introduced herself to Penn as a wireless operator. She has told the Nazis she's a wireless operator. MADNESS—that's not why she's here and so now they've gone to a lot of effort to get code out of her—Penn hadn't any doubt they'd got code out of her, must be obsolete or invented, but definitely something they can try to work with. Penn thinks that's exactly why she told them

she was a w/op—they call it W/T in SOE, wireless telegraphist: so she could give them code. It's more common for a girl in SOE to land in France as a courier, but if Julie had told them she was a courier they'd have grilled her about her circuit—obsolete code is safer to betray, I suppose, than real live people. And it's straight truth in terms of Julie's original training and her WAAF commission, and it goes along with the pictures they took at the crash site, which they've certainly shown her by now. As long as they're focused on her nonexistent wireless activities they won't ask her about Operation Blow-up-the-Ormaie-Gestapo-HQ or whatever it's really called.

Penn was shown only a few of the administrative offices and an empty dorm room with four tidy beds in it—no contact with any other prisoners and no sign of the conditions they're kept in. Julie gave her some clues. She said

She

Julie was

—BLAST IT. Fly the plane, Maddie.

I WILL NOT CRY.

I got to talk to Miss Penn myself. Mitraillette and I met her by a little pond in a posh residential area of Ormaie and sat on a bench winding yarn while we talked, one of us girls on each side of Miss Penn and a canvas bag in her lap full of worn-out woolly socks to be unraveled. She must have looked like our nanny. She's nearly a foot taller than either of us. She talked and we kept dipping into the bag for more yarn while we listened. Suddenly in the middle of her report, as I reached for another sock, Miss Penn took hold of my hand and held it tight. Just mine, not Mitraillette's. Don't know how she guessed that I was the one who'd take it hard. A bit of an interrogator herself, now that I think about it—same job as the rest of them, pulling sensational stories out of reluctant sources. They all do it differently, but it's the same job. And Julie, also an expert, made it easy, volunteering information that Penn didn't ask for.

"You feeling brave, Kittyhawk?" Penn said, holding my hand tightly.

I gave her a sort of grimace of a smile. "I suppose."

“There’s no nice way to tell you this,” Penn said, and her crisp, no-nonsense American voice was angry. We waited.

Penn told us quietly, “She’s been tortured.”

Couldn’t answer for a minute. Couldn’t do anything.

Probably seemed quite sullen—not surprised, really, but Penn was so frank it felt like being hit in the face. Finally I croaked stupidly, “Are you sure?”

“She showed me,” Penn said. “She was pretty clear about it. Adjusted her scarf as soon as we’d shaken hands—gave me a good look. Ugly row of narrow triangular burns across her throat and collarbone, just beginning to heal. It looked like it had been done with a soldering iron. More of the same all along the insides of her wrists. She was very clever about showing me, cool as you please, no drama about it. She’d give her skirt a twitch as she crossed her legs, or let her sleeve ruck back as she took a cigarette, only moving when the captain was looking somewhere else. Ghastly bruises on her legs. But the marks are fading now, must have all been done two or three weeks ago. They’ve eased off on her. I don’t know why—she’s made some kind of deal with them, that’s for sure, or she wouldn’t still be here. You’d have thought by now Ormaie would have either got what they wanted out of her or given up.”

“Made a deal with them!” I choked.

“Well, some of us manage to pull it off.” Miss Penn gently guided my hand back to the bag of socks. Then she confessed, “Hard to tell what your friend thinks she’s doing, though. She was—she was *focused*. She didn’t expect to hear her own code name come up in the conversation and it shook her, but she didn’t—you know, she didn’t hint at rescue—I think she’s still dead set on completing her assignment, and has reason to believe she can do it from inside.” Miss Penn gave me a sideways glance. “Do you know what her assignment was?”

“No,” I lied.

“Well,” Miss Penn said, “here’s what she told me. Maybe you can make something of it.”

But I can’t. I don’t know what to do with any of it. It’s like—it must be like paleontology. Trying to put a dinosaur together based on a few random bones and you don’t even

know if they're all from the same kind of animal.

I'll write down what Julie's given us, though—perhaps Paul will make sense of it—

1) The building the Gestapo use in Ormaie has got its own generator. Penn was complaining about power cuts, and how annoying it is not to be able to count on electricity when you work in radio, and Julie said, "Well, here we make it ourselves." How like her to talk as if she'd become one of them. Like the time she took me to see *Colonel Blimp* and sat there weeping all through the scene where the imprisoned German officers are listening to Mendelssohn.

2) The fuse box is under the grand staircase. Miss Penn didn't say how our Julie managed to communicate that. Did also mention:

3) It is a known fact that the Nazis have a wireless office across the square from the Gestapo HQ, in the town hall, and according to Julie this must be because there is no regular broadcasting setup in the Château de Bordeaux building—Penn thinks because the walls are too thick for good reception, but I reckon the generator interferes with the reception more than the walls. This information was passed dead casually—SOE call radio work "arthritis," easy peasy. Can just imagine Julie. Studying her nails. "Fortunately I don't suffer from stiff joints. No one does here. How these Nazis would take advantage!"

4) Penn also found out a lot about the slave-girl secretary. Julie thinks she is about to have a crisis of conscience, which we might be able to take advantage of—suggests we watch her and make it easy for her to find a Resistance contact when she's ready.

It boggles me trying to think how Julie managed to communicate all this with the Gestapo captain *listening*. Apparently they were speaking English and the slave girl had to translate for the captain, so either she just didn't get it or she put up with it, which partly proves Julie's point. Julie calls her "the angel"—"*l'ange*"—dead embarrassing if you ask me. No wonder the poor girl keeps mum. It's masculine, too, in French, not just a plain noun like it is in English. It is a direct translation of her surname, Engel, from the German.

Sometimes Julie used to make me jealous—her cleverness, her ease with men, how posh she is—the grouse-shooting and the Swiss school and speaking three languages and being presented to the king in a blue silk ball gown—even her MBE after she caught those spies, like being knighted, and *especially* her term at Oxford—and I hate myself for ever having thought any of it was worth envying.

Now all I can think of is where she is and how much I love her. And I start to cry again.

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I dreamed I was flying with Julie. I was taking her home, flying up to Scotland in Dymrna's Puss Moth. We were heading up the coast along the North Sea, the sun hanging low in the west—sky and sea and sand all gold, gold light all around us. No barrage balloons or anything, just empty sky like in peacetime. But it wasn't peacetime, it was now, late November 1943, with the first snow on the Cheviot Hills in the west.

We were flying low over the long sands at Holy Island, and it was beautiful, but the plane kept trying to climb and I was fighting and fighting to keep it down. Just like the Lysander. Scared and worried and tired all at once, angry at the sky for being so beautiful when we were in danger of crashing. Then Julie, sitting alongside me, said, "Let me help."

In the dream the Puss Moth had side-by-side dual controls like a Topsy, and Julie took hold of her own control column and gently pushed the nose forward, and suddenly we were flying the plane together.

All the pressure was gone. Nothing to be afraid of, nothing to battle against, just the two of us flying together, flying the plane together, side by side in the gold sky.

"Easy peasy," she said, and laughed, and it was.

Oh Julie, wouldn't I *know* if you were dead? Wouldn't I feel it happening, like a jolt of electricity to my heart?

Amélie has just seen an execution at the Château de Bordeaux. Château des Bourreaux is what everybody calls it now—Castle of Butchers. The kids here get Thursday off school instead of Saturday, and Amélie had gone into Ormaie with a couple of her chums to a cheap café they like, which happens to be at the end of the lower lane at the back of the Gestapo building. Amélie and her friends were sitting in the café window and noticed a crowd gathering in the lane—being kids they piled along to see what was going on—turns out those bastards had a guillotine rigged up in their rear courtyard and were executing people—

The kids *saw*. They didn't know what was going on or they'd have never gone to look, Amélie says, but they arrived just as it was happening and they saw it. SAW IT HAPPEN. She has been sobbing her heart out all evening, impossible to comfort her. They saw a girl killed and Amélie *recognized her* from her school, though the girl had been a few years ahead of Amélie and had already finished—what if it had been my old friend Beryl? Or Beryl's sister? Because that's what it's like, schoolmates being guillotined as spies. I didn't understand before—really didn't understand. Being a kid and worrying that a bomb might kill you is terrible. But being a kid and worrying that the police might cut your head off is something else entirely. I haven't words for it. Every fresh broken horror is something I just didn't understand until I came here.

When I was eight, before the Depression, we had a holiday in Paris—I remember bits of it, we took a boat trip on the Seine, and we saw the *Mona Lisa*. But the thing I remember most is how Grandad and I went to the top of the Eiffel Tower. We took the lift up but we walked the whole way down, and on the way we stopped at the first stage and we could see Gran standing in the park below, wearing a big new hat she'd bought that morning, and we waved at her—she looked so posh, all alone in the Champ de Mars, that you'd have never known she wasn't French herself. She took a picture of us and though we were so far away and tiny you can't see us in the picture, I know we are

there. And I remember also there was a shop, way up there on the first stage, and Grandad bought me a tiny gold Eiffel Tower on a gold chain as a souvenir, and I still have it, back home in Stockport.

It wasn't so long ago. What is *happening* to us?

Maman Thibaut has been dosing Amélie with café au lait at the big kitchen table. Mitraillette and I taking turns holding her tight and exchanging horrified glances over her head. She won't stop talking. I only get every third word or so. Mitraillette whispers a rough translation—

“Il y en avait une autre—there was another. Il y avaient deux filles—there were two girls—La Cadette et ses amies n'ont rien vu quand on a tué l'autre—”

They didn't see the second girl executed. It was torment for *all* of us, dragging this information out of La Cadette. There were *two* girls brought there together, tied to each other. The second had to stand and watch as they butchered the first—so close, they made her stand *so close*, that Amélie said the blood splattered on her face. Then they closed the gates. Over the courtyard wall Amélie and her friends saw them raising the blade again and that was when they left.

The second girl was Julie. Certain of it. There can't be another petite blonde in a pullover the color of autumn leaves being held prisoner in the Ormaie Gestapo HQ. Amélie *saw her*.

But I don't believe they killed her, either. I just don't believe it. I keep thinking of those pictures of the pilot. They must have shown Julie those pictures by now, and perhaps she thinks I'm dead. But I'm not. And it's the same for her, I'm sure of it. It might look like she's dead, but she's not. They've got a reason to fake her death now, since Georgia Penn talked to her this week and they need to re-establish their supremacy or whatever—their control over what everybody knows or doesn't know. That captain/commander must be in trouble—he went behind his superior's back to let Penn in. Perhaps he's been told to kill Julie. But I think he's just as likely been told to stage her death, so she disappears again. Sharing cognac with her and sending her to the guillotine in the same week? I just don't believe it.

I WANT TO BLOW THAT PLACE APART.

Planes go over almost every night—there are some munitions factories working for the Germans and launch sites here in France that they are desperate to put out of action. They won't drop a bomb in the middle of Ormaie, not on purpose, for fear of hitting civilians. They have hit the railway junction here and had a go at the factories to the north of the city, though I don't think Ormaie carries on any significant manufacture apart from umbrellas. But the RAF won't bomb the middle of the city. It's why Julie was sent here, so we could get at it from the ground. Not many people here know the RAF is trying to avoid hitting them—no one feels safe.

The Americans dropped some bombs on Rouen in broad daylight. People panic when they hear the air raid sirens and dive for shelter just like we did back in the Manchester Blitz. But nothing ever hits the center of Ormaie.

Sometimes I wish it would—just one great big blast to wipe out the Castle of Butchers. I want that evil place to go up in flames. I want it so badly it *hurts*. Then I remember that Julie is still inside.

I don't believe she's dead, I don't believe any of their bluff and lies and bullying threats. I don't believe she's dead and I WON'T believe she's dead until I hear the shots MYSELF and see her fall.

Another Nazi Sunday dinner at the Thibauts', 28 Nov. Had to make myself scarce. Can just imagine La Cadette feeding them our line—"Käthe has got an *older man*! You would not believe how fast she works. It is a friend of Papa's driver. She met him when we were loading hens a couple of weeks ago. They go out together every Sunday. And some evenings too!"

And Maman, rolling her eyes, "It's not right, not right for such a young girl, he's twice her age. But what can I do to stop her? She's not my own—we work her hard and she gets no wages, so I have to give her Sunday afternoons—and she's of age. I just hope she's careful, doesn't get herself *in trouble*...."

"In trouble" with Paul, yecccchhh.

He and I bicycled off together to someone else's house to refine my bomb-making and gun-firing skills. It is such a relief to focus on some neutral thing—how much plastic explosive you need to blow up a car, how to wire up the switches, how to use a magnet to attach a detonator, how to hit a moving target with a pocket pistol—a borrowed one, as Käthe doesn't normally carry a gun since she would get arrested if she was caught with it. Thank you, Jamie and Julie Beaufort-Stuart, for the first few shooting lessons. Today's moving target was not an Me-109 or a pheasant but an empty tin on a stick, waved about by a very brave soul at the other end of the garden. The noise is hidden by the sound of a sawmill adjacent to the house. I don't know if they normally work on a Sunday afternoon or if the noise was laid on specially for us.

"It is a pity we cannot keep you, Kittyhawk," said the man whose house it was. "You were born to be a soldier."

Huh. Makes me quite puffed up with pride and yet fills me with scorn all at the same time—what rubbish! I wasn't born to be a soldier. There's a war on, so I'm delivering airplanes. But I don't go looking for adventure or excitement, and I jolly well don't go around picking fights with people. I like making things work. I *love* flying.

Have to remind myself I am still Maddie—haven't heard my own name for seven weeks. And my stunt double Käthe is going to be pushed to her limits in the next few days.

She—I—am supposed to deliver the message—invitation?—to Julie's recruit, the German slave-girl secretary, Engel. Why me? Because I'm not local and with luck I won't still be here after the next full moon. Engel doesn't know my face. Very few people do. But I hadn't ever seen her before today, so we arranged for me to get a good look at her before I have to approach her in the street tomorrow. Paul and I came back to the Thibauts' farm before the Nazi visitors left, and we waited—waited—waited for them to come out.

We'd closed the gate. So the Gestapo Mercedes had to stop, and Engel, who is their driver, had to get out to open the gate.

There was me, standing at the side of the road with my murdered man's bicycle, waiting well back from the Merc with my head down and wearing one of Maman Thibaut's motherly kerchiefs. There was Paul, feeling up the German girl bold as brass—I am sure no one gave me a second glance because *what* a performance he put on. He let the poor lass get the gate open about a foot or so, then put one of his big hands over hers, to help, right, but he managed to get his other hand spread across her bum as they pushed the gate open together. I think it is safe to say she now hates him as much as I do. She scurried back to the car clutching her coat and skirt tight around her legs, and Etienne was in the backseat laughing.

But all Paul's fooling about did give me a good look at her. She's tall, about my age, dark brown hair in a severe crimped bob, a bit old-fashioned. Astonishing pale green eyes. Not pretty but interesting—she'd probably be a knockout in a red cocktail dress, but looked dead frowny and drab in her sensible shoes and dust-colored overcoat.

Oh I sound like Julie. "I say, Nazi Slave Girl, you'd look *super* if you'd let me have a go at your eyebrows."

So Engel stormed back to the car and stalled it getting into gear—she was that angry. Started it up again right away though, pulled away smoothly—didn't even look at Paul as she drove off, left him to close the gate himself.

Don't think any of them noticed me. They were far too busy watching the Paul and Engel romantic comedy.

I got a look at the Gestapo captain too.

I know I was supposed to keep my head down. But I couldn't stop myself gaping a little. That is the man who interrogated Julie, the man who will order her execution—or who already has. I don't know what I expected, but he just looked like *anybody*—like the sort of chap who would come into the shop and buy a motorbike for his lad's sixteenth birthday—like your headmaster. But also—he looked like he was on his knees. Dog tired, absolutely haggard with it. He looked like he hadn't slept for a week. The pilots all looked like that in September of '40, during the worst days of the Battle of Britain—the vicar's lad looked like that, running out to his plane, the day he was killed.

I didn't know then—I mean, I didn't know earlier today, when I saw the captain's face and thought how tired and worried he seemed—but I know now that the Ormaie Gestapo is in uproar not only because of the captain having made the mistake about allowing Penn's interview, but also because they have been *burgled*. Mitraillette dragged this out of Slave-Girl Engel during the ritual cognac at the Thibauts'. A set of keys went missing for an hour early last week and then turned up again in the wrong place, and nobody can account for the time they were gone. Every single one of the staff has been grilled by the captain, and tomorrow the captain himself goes to be grilled by his commander, the dreadful Nikolaus Ferber.

If I were the captain I would clamp a muzzle on Engel—fairly certain she's not supposed to leak information like that. Well—if she won't come to us willingly, perhaps we can blackmail her—now's our chance—

And it's down to me to pull her in. Can't believe I told that intelligence officer I couldn't do this kind of work! Couldn't be more anxious than I am anyway—*so relieved* to be doing anything useful. Don't think I'll sleep much tonight, though. I keep thinking about what Theo said after my first Lysander ferry flight—"We might as well be operational—"

FLY THE PLANE, MADDIE

Horrid dream about guillotines. All in French, probably very bad French—never imagined I could dream in French! I was using Etienne’s pocketknife to tighten up screws attaching a cable that lifted the blade, to make sure it would fall cleanly. Sickening—if it was a messy death it would all be my fault. I kept thinking, It works just like a choke—*C’est comme un starter*

Aye right, miss, as Jock would say.

If I don’t end up in that foul hotel courtyard with my head in a tin washtub it will be a blooming miracle.

I sat in Amélie’s favorite café for an hour waiting for an old man whose name I don’t know to tell me, “*L’ange descend en dix minutes—*” Ten minutes till the angel comes down. That meant Engel had gone to get the car out of the garage so she can take the Gestapo captain to meet his dreadful C.O. Then all I had to do was walk past the front of the hotel just as she was ushering him into the car, and hand her a lipstick with a slip of paper hidden in the sleeve, which tells her where we have arranged her own personal *cache*—if she wants to make contact with the Resistance, she can leave a note in the kids’ café, folded in a linen handkerchief that is wedged beneath a table leg to stop it rocking.

Of course, she can also set a trap for me now, since I will have to collect the note and she knows it.

You know what? If she’s going to rat on me, she doesn’t need to set a trap. If she’s going to rat on me, I’m already dead.

When I caught up with her this afternoon I knelt quickly at her feet, as though she’d lost something, when really it was me planting it there. Then I stood up and held out the little shiny tube. I smiled like an idiot and spoke half a dozen of the two dozen words I know in German.

“Verzeihung, aber Sie haben Ihren Lippenstift fallengelassen—”

Excuse me, you dropped your lipstick.

The captain was already inside the car and Engel hadn’t opened her own door yet. He couldn’t hear us. I wouldn’t be able to understand anything she answered, so I was just supposed to smile sweetly and if she didn’t take the lipstick I

was supposed to say “*Es tut mir leid, daß es doch nicht Ihr Lippenstift war—*” I’m sorry, it wasn’t your lipstick after all.

She looked down at the gold tube, frowning, then looked up at my bland, gormless grin.

She asked curiously, and in English, “Are you Maddie Brodatt?”

It’s a good thing I was already smiling. I just sort of let the smile sit frozen on my face. Felt utterly false, as though I had on a mask—like I was wearing someone else’s face. But I didn’t stop smiling. I shook my head.

“Käthe Habicht,” I said.

She nodded once—like a bow. She took the lipstick, opened the driver’s door of the Mercedes, and climbed in.

“*Danke*, Käthe,” she said before she shut the door. Thanks, Käthe. Dead casual. Informal and cheeky, as though I were a little girl.

As she drove away I remembered that Käthe isn’t supposed to understand English.

Fly the plane.

I wish I could, I wish, I WISH I HAD CONTROL.

I'm not dead yet, and we've got Engel's answer. I collected it myself, getting quite confident about cycling into town, as Mitraillette always uses the same checkpoint—they know me now, and wave me through without bothering to check my papers. Engel's left us Julie's scarf. I didn't recognize it at first. It was lying under the table in the café, and the lad who sweeps the floors handed it to me. "*C'est à vous?*"—is this yours? I didn't know what it was, at first—a wad of dull gray cloth—but when I touched it I realized it was silk, so I took it, in case it was important. I knotted it around my neck, smiling my idiot's smile—"Merci." Thanks.

I sat there for ten more minutes, my stomach turning over with fear and excitement, forcing myself to finish a bowl of the most horrid phony coffee ever brewed so I wouldn't look suspicious leaving in a hurry.

Bicycled home like a demon, pulled the crumpled silk from around my neck, and spread it flat on my bed in Etienne's room. That's when I realized it was Julie's Parisian silk scarf—

I was only little when Dad died, but I remember how I used to open the drawer where he kept his ties, before Gran cleared them out, and take a big sniff. And the ties all smelled like Dad, still—like cherry tobacco and cologne and a whiff of motor oil. I loved the smell of those ties. It brought him back.

Julie's scarf doesn't smell like Julie anymore. I did stick my nose in it. It smells like carbolic soap. Like a school. Or a prison, I suppose. There's ink smeared all over one corner and the silk's all perished down the middle, as though she and Engel have been playing tug of war with it.

That chemical smell, sweet and tarry. Not like Julie at all. It reminded me that Penn told us Engel is a chemist.

I ran downstairs. "*Tu cherches Gabrielle-Thérèse*—you want my sister?" asked La Cadette, glancing up from her schoolbooks at the kitchen table.

"*Oui—tout de suite—right now.* I need an iron—a hot iron—oh bother—" Frustration, I had no idea how to say it. Mimed

ironing. That kid is so sharp—got it right away, tossed Maman's irons into the kitchen fire to hot up, pointed me to the ironing board, and ran for her sister.

Mitraillette and Amélie and I stood like the witches in *Macbeth* over the ironing board, holding our breath—I was so worried I'd ruin it, burn the scarf, but I didn't—and after a minute or so Engel's message began to appear in scratchy brown print among the gray paisley, in the corner opposite the ink stain.

You don't need to be trained by the Special Operations Executive to know how to use invisible ink. You don't even need to be a chemist. Beryl and I learned how to do it in Girl Guides. We used to write secret messages in milk. It's easy.

I don't know what Engel used, but she wrote in French, so I don't remember her exact words. She's either tipped us off or betrayed us. We won't know which till later tonight. Mitraillette has sent for Paul—they use his courier as the go-between—we don't actually know where he stays.

This evening there are 19 prisoners from Poitiers being transported to a concentration camp somewhere in the northeast of France. The bus will swing by Ormaie and pick up 5 more prisoners here. Julie will be with them.

If I make it like an accident report—

Don't think I can possibly make it sound like an accident report, but I've got to write something—I'll have to remember—there may be a trial. I don't bloody care if there is. I want to get it right while I remember.

Mitraillette tried to dose me with knockout drops again a few minutes ago—30 minutes to oblivion. But this time I'm wise to her and I want to write. Perhaps I'll take it after.

I think I will. When I'm finished I won't want to think anymore

INCIDENT REPORT

Attempted Sabotage of Poitou River Bridge on Tours-Poitiers Road, with intention of stopping German military bus carrying 24 French and Allied prisoners—Wed. 1 Dec. 1943

Well, we did stop them.

Made a great big hole in the bridge, too, that'll keep them deporting anybody via the railway station at Tours for a while

I HATE THEM

I HATE THEM

Must remember Paul—Paul, who I also hated.

He was marvelous. I have to say it. He planned it all on the fly, made it up as we went along. The carnage wasn't his fault. Mustered an army of a dozen men and two women in about an hour. We left all the bikes and the car hidden—it is the same Citroën Rosalie, I don't know how the man who owns it avoids being found out or at least having his car impounded, and I think he is too old for this kind of job anyway. We hid the car in a garage, believe it or not, belonging to a lovely and heroic old woman who lives by herself in a riverside villa on the Tours side of the Poitou. She is the rose-grower the circuit is named for. We left our car parked *behind* her car, which is conveniently

a newer and bigger model Rosalie, so it looked like ours had been her previous car, and we hid it under a dust sheet as well. The bikes were hidden in her abandoned stables beneath twenty-year-old hay.

Then we borrowed her boats. One beautiful teak nineteenth-century rowboat and two chestnut Canadian canoes. Much too good for us. The bridge is upstream from the house—they've disrupted traffic here before, some time ago, and for a while the lady was under strict surveillance. Hope she won't be in too much trouble again now—though she seems to have got away with it this time. We were careful.

Godless as I am, I pray she's got away with it. It's like ripples in a pond, isn't it? It doesn't stop in one place.

Anyway, we loaded up our fireworks in the boats—don't think I can give details on the explosives, as I wasn't responsible and didn't pay attention, and we rowed up to the bridge in the dark. Took about an hour with muffled oars. You read about muffled oars in pirate stories—I'm sure there's a bit in *Peter Pan* where they use muffled oars. Perhaps it was *Swallows and Amazons*. English summer and the school holidays seem dead far away now. It was hard to see—the river was full of fog. But we made it. We wired up the bridge and waited.

What went wrong?

I don't know, I honestly don't know. It wasn't a trap. We weren't outnumbered, not at first. I suppose we were just playing for higher stakes than the Germans. Shouldn't we have guessed they'd be more ruthless than us? How *could* we guess? We were pretty ruthless.

What went wrong—perhaps it was just too dark, night and fog both. The fog was good as well as bad, because it hid us, but it was just so hard to see. There should have been a quarter moon, for what that's worth, but the sky was overcast, and we were blind until the prison bus turned up with its headlights blazing.

That bit went well—within a minute we had thoroughly disabled it. We were pretty well camouflaged in the riverbank scrub—a tangle of willow and alder and poplar full of mistletoe. Lots of tall withering weeds hiding us, and the fog did too. Our

small explosion hurt no one except the bridge and the bus. The radiator grille got blown out, but the blast missed the headlights and the battery must have been OK, because there was enough light that Paul and the owner of the Rosalie somehow managed to put bullets through three of the tires.

The driver got out. Then a guard got out. They had electric torches—both men walked up and down the length of the bus inspecting the damage and cursing.

Paul picked them off like ducks at a funfair with his Sten submachine gun. While that was going on I was curled uselessly in a ball with my arms over my head and my teeth clenched, so I missed a bit of the action. Born to be a soldier, my foot. A raid is actually quite a lot like a battle. It is war. It's war in miniature, but it's still WAR.

Two other guards came out of the bus and fired random shots into the bushes at us in the dark. Mitraillette had to sit on me to stop me blowing our cover, I was in such a flap. Finally Paul gave me a clout over the head.

“Get a grip on yourself, Kittyhawk,” he hissed. “We need you. You're a crack shot but no one's expecting you to kill anybody. Focus on tools, all right? They'll start trying to fix things in a moment. Try to disable their equipment.”

I gulped and nodded. Don't know if he saw me nodding, but he shifted back to his own position beneath the gently rustling willow herb and hemlock alongside the Rosalie driver, and they bagged another guard.

The surviving guard leaped back into the bus. There was ominous silence—not a thing happened for a minute or two. Then the four remaining soldiers ushered every single one of the prisoners out of the bus and made them lie down side by side on their faces in the middle of the road. It was all done by the glancing light of electric torches and we didn't dare fire at anyone now, for fear of hitting one of ours.

Couldn't see any individual faces—couldn't tell anything about the captives, not their age or their sex or how they were dressed, but you could tell by the way they moved that some of them were scared and some were defiant, and some were chained together by their feet. The chained ones had a hard

time getting down to the road, tripping each other up as they climbed off the bus. When everybody was lined up on their faces in the mud like sardines, one of the guards shot six of them in the head.

It happened SO FAST.

This dreadful man shouted at us in French. Mitraillette whispered all the English words she could come up with in my ear—"Revenge—two for one—their own dead. If we kill—"

"I know, I know," I whispered back. "*Je sais.*" For every one of them we murdered they would murder two of us. Disposable hostages.

Three guards kept their guns trained on the prisoners while the fourth set off on foot back down the road—to find a telephone, I think.

Then we waited. Stalemate. It was bitterly cold.

Paul and a couple of other men had a quick whispered council and decided to work their way beneath the bridge and try to attack the guards from behind. There really were only three guards left, plus the one who had gone for help—it seemed impossible we shouldn't be able to get the better of them.

But they had 18 hostages lying helpless and chained at their feet.

And one of their hostages was Julie.

Or perhaps, I worried then, perhaps she'd already been shot. Impossible to tell at first. But the guards set up a portable floodlight attached to the bus's battery, and got the prisoners spotlighted, and you could see now that only a few of them were women, and that everybody looked half starved. And among them, right in the middle of them, was the one I was looking for—a mound of blond hair and a flame-colored pullover. Her arms were bound tightly behind her back, with wire it looked like, so she really was lying flat on her face more than the others, who were resting on their forearms. But she wasn't at the end of the row, she wasn't one of the six that had just been killed. She was breathing quietly, waiting. Shaking with cold like the rest of us.

And we waited, I think, for an hour.

The guards made sure they were hard to aim at. They kept moving and flashing their electric torches into our faces—or where they thought our faces were—occasionally blinding us. I discovered later that I'd bitten my thumbnails down to their bleeding nail beds waiting for Paul's planned assault from behind. It never came. The three German soldiers organized themselves so that they were always facing in different directions, and one of them always kept a gun trained on the prisoners. We just couldn't get to them. One of the women lying in the road began to weep—I think it was just because she was so cold—and when the man next to her tried to put his arm around her, a guard shot him in the hand.

That was when I realized that we weren't going to win this battle—that we could not win.

I think Mitraillette knew it then, too. She squeezed my shoulder lightly. She was also weeping. But silently.

The fourth guard came back and began to chat casually with his mates. We waited. It was not quiet anymore, because as well as the soldiers talking and the woman crying, the man with the hurt hand was groaning and gasping. But there wasn't much other noise—only the little noises of night on a riverbank, wind in the bare branches, the hollow rush of water beneath the damaged stone bridge.

Then Julie lifted her head and said something to the soldiers that *made them laugh*. I think—I swear, we couldn't hear her, but I swear she was chatting them up. Or something like it. One of them came over and prodded her here and there with the end of his rifle, as though he were testing a piece of meat. Then he squatted down by her head and took her chin in his hand. He asked her a question.

She bit him.

He pushed her face down into the road, hard, and scrambled to his feet, but as he lowered his rifle at her, one of the other guards laughed and stopped him.

"He says not to kill her," Mitraillette whispered. "If they kill her there will be no—fun."

"Is she crazy?" I hissed. "What the blazes did she bite him for? She'll get herself shot!"

“Exactement,” Mitraillette agreed. *“C’est rapide—fast.* No Nazi fun.”

The reinforcements arrived. Two military lorries with canvas sides, with half a dozen armed guards in each. Even then we still weren’t badly outnumbered. They began to unload sandbags and planks and managed to lever the bus up out of the hole it had landed in, reversed it, and laid planks over the damage so they could try to get the lorries across.

But then when they were ready to load the lorries, they got resistance. Not just from us. A few of their captives came to life—a handful of the men who weren’t chained just ran for it, dived into the ditch at the opposite side of the road and, lucky for them, it turned out, ran straight into Paul and his men, who hustled them under the bridge and back to the boats by the river path. More shooting as a couple of soldiers went after them and Paul’s men pounded the soldiers. Go for the equipment, Paul had ordered, and for a minute the gunfire was so fierce I knew two shots from my small revolver would go unnoticed. I aimed at the chains. The Double Tap, two quick shots at the same target. The chains I was aiming at burst apart like a toy balloon—could hardly believe my luck. And the two men I’d managed to free also ran.

When another man tried to run, the soldiers mowed him down like bank robbers in an American gangster film.

When the first men had fled, the guard Julie had attacked held her down with his heel dug into the back of her neck—he wasn’t giving her a chance. She fought hard and got kicked for it by the one who had said not to kill her. So now, with a few of the hostages dead and a few loaded up in the lorries and a few escaped, there were only seven living people left lying on the ground—Julie, with the guard’s boot against the back of her neck, and two other women. Two of the remaining men were chained ankle to ankle. And now the German corporal or whatever he was, the fellow in charge who had arrived with the reinforcements, decided to teach everyone a thorough lesson—us for trying to free their prisoners and the prisoners for wanting to be freed—

He picked on the men, mainly, the two who weren’t chained, and hauled them to their feet. And seeing that Julie

was getting special treatment from the man who was holding her in place with his foot, he hauled her to her feet as well and pushed her over to stand next to the two other standing prisoners—one of them a sturdy workman and one a handsome lad my own age, both ragged and battered.

Julie was ragged too. She was still wearing exactly the clothes she'd had on when she parachuted into France, gray wool flannel skirt and Parisian chic pullover the burnt scarlet-orange of Chinese lanterns, with holes in the elbows now. Her hair shone brassy gold in the artificial light, falling loose and wild down her back. Her face was skin over bone. As though—as though she'd aged fifty years in eight weeks—gaunt, gray, frail. The dead spit of Jamie when I first met him in hospital. But thinner. She looked like a kid, a head shorter than the shortest of the men standing around her. Any of those soldiers could have picked her up and tossed her in the air.

Three prisoners in a line. The soldier in command gave an order, and the guard who'd been holding Julie down took aim at the younger of the captive men and with one bullet maimed him low between his legs.

The lad shrieked and collapsed and they fired at him again, first blowing apart one elbow and then the other, and they hauled him to his feet again, still shrieking, and made him walk to the lorry and climb in and they turned to the next man and fired on him low in the groin also.

Mitraillette and I both knelt wheezing with horror, side by side under cover of the undergrowth and darkness. Julie stood cowering, white as paper in the harsh glare of the floodlight, staring straight ahead of her at nothing. She was next. She knew it. We all knew it. But they weren't finished with their second victim yet.

When they shot him in one elbow and then again rapidly in the same place to shatter it, my not-very-reliable control just went and I burst into tears. I couldn't help it, something snapped, like when we went to help the gunner at Maidsend and found the dead boys. I burst into loud, gulping sobs, bawling like a baby.

Her face—Julie's face—her face suddenly lit up like a sunrise. Joy and relief and hope all there at once, and she was

instantly lovely again, herself, *beautiful*. She heard me. Recognized my fear-of-gunfire blubbing. She didn't dare call out to me, didn't dare give me away, Ormaie's most desperate fugitive.

They fired at the second man again, destroying his other arm, and he fainted dead away. They had to drag him to the lorry.

Julie was next.

Suddenly she laughed wildly and gave a shaking yell, her voice high and desperate.

"KISS ME, HARDY! Kiss me, QUICK!"

Turned her face away from me to make it easier.

And I shot her.

I saw her body flinch—the blows knocked her head aside as though she'd been thumped in the face. Then she was gone.

Gone. One moment flying in green sunlight, then the sky suddenly gray and dark. Out like a candle. Here, then gone.

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I'll just keep writing, shall I? Because that wasn't the end. It wasn't even a pause.

The officer pulled another woman up from the ground to take Julie's place. This doomed girl screamed at us in French: "*ALLEZ! ALLEZ!*" Go! Go! "*Résistance idiots sales, vous nous MASSACREZ TOUS!*"

FILTHY RESISTANCE IDIOTS, YOU'RE KILLING US ALL

I knew what she was saying even with my rubbish schoolgirl French. And she was right.

We ran. They fired at our backs and came after us. Paul and his men fired at THEIR backs, swarming over the bridge walls, and they turned to face this rear attack. Carnage. CARNAGE. Half of us, Paul with them, were torn to bits on the bridge. The rest of us made it back to the boats and set off down the river with the five fugitives we'd managed to save.

When we were away from the bank and someone else was rowing and there was nothing more for me to do, I bent over with my head on my knees, my heart in pieces. It is still in pieces. I think it will be in pieces forever.

Mitraillette gently unlocked my fingers from the Colt .32 and made me put it away. She whispered, "*C'était la Vérité?*" Was that Verity?

Or perhaps she just meant, Was that the truth? Was it true? Did any of it really happen? Were the last three hours *real*?

"Yes," I whispered back. "*Oui. C'était la vérité.*"

Don't know how I kept going. You just do. You have to, so you do.

The original idea, when we hoped we'd have 24 extra people to move and hide, was to ferry them to the opposite bank where we'd divide them into smaller groups of 2 or 3. Then we were going to split up our own team to guide them cross-country toward various sheds and cow byres for the night before the more complicated task of smuggling them safely out

of France across the Pyrenees or the English Channel. But now we only had 5 fugitives to hide and there were only 7 of us left so there was room for everybody to make a single trip back to the riverside villa. Mitraillette made the decision to keep us together. Don't think I'd ever noticed—so absorbed in my own fears and worries—but she was Paul's second-in-command.

Not sure we'd have pulled it off without her, either. We were all just *so dazed*. But she drove us like a demon. "*Vite! Vite!*" Quickly! Orders whispered sharp and quiet—boats hauled back onto their racks, oars put away, all of it carefully dried off with dust sheets, which we hid beneath the floorboards afterward. You can work in a daze. If someone gives you a mindless job to do you can do it automatically, even if your heart is in pieces. Mitraillette thought of everything—perhaps she's done it before? We brushed the oars and hulls lightly with handfuls of ancient straw from the stables, leaving a fine layer of dust over everything. The 5 men from the prison bus worked silently and willingly alongside us, anxious to help. The boathouse was perfect when we left—looked like it hadn't been used in years.

Then the Nazi search party arrived and we spent an hour lying in the mud along the riverbank, hiding in the bulrushes like Moses, waiting for them to leave. Could hear them chatting with the groundskeeper. He came back later to lock up the boathouse and give us the all-clear—such as it was—now there were Nazi guards posted on the front drive, so we'd not be getting the Rosalie out any time soon. But the grounds-keeper thought it would be safe for a couple of bicycles to leave by the river path on the opposite bank. Benzedrine handed out all 'round. Got one of the canoes out again and ferried two of the bikes, two of us, and two of the escaped prisoners over the river and saw them off into the fog.

At this point one of the remaining lads from the bus collapsed in a shivering heap and Mitraillette sort of stalled.

"*Nous sommes faits,*" she said. We've had it.

We bedded down in the stables with the bicycles. Not the safest place in the world.

I wonder where that is right now—the safest place in the world? Even the neutral countries, Sweden and Switzerland, are

surrounded. Ireland's stuck with being divided. They have to mark the neutral bit "IRELAND" in big letters made of whitewashed stones, hoping the Germans won't drop bombs there thinking it's the UK side of the northern border. I've seen it from the air. South America, perhaps.

We were all still wide awake when it grew light. I was sitting with my arms wrapped around my knees, side by side with one of the lads who'd escaped when I shot his chains apart. The men who'd been chained had to stay with us, because they had to get rid of the fetters on their ankles before they could go anywhere.

"How did they catch you? What did you do?" I asked, forgetting he was French. He answered me in English, though.

"Just what you did," he said bitterly. "Blew up a bridge and failed to stop the German army."

"Why didn't they just shoot you?"

He grinned. All his upper teeth had been savagely broken. "Why do you think, *gosse anglaise*?" English kid. "They cannot question you if they shoot you."

"How come only some of you were chained?"

"Only some of us are dangerous." He was still grinning. I suppose he had reason to be optimistic—he'd been given a second chance at life, at hope. A slim one, but better than he'd had twelve hours ago. "They chain you if they think you are dangerous. The girl whose arms were tied behind her, did you see her? She wasn't dangerous, she was a—*collaboratrice*." Collaborator. He spat into the disintegrating straw.

The shattered pieces of my heart went cold. I felt as if I'd swallowed shards of ice.

"Stop," I said. "*Tais-toi*. SHUT UP."

He didn't hear me, or didn't take me seriously, and carried on relentlessly: "Better off dead, that one. Did you see her, even lying in the road last night, sweet-talking the guards in German? Because her arms were bound, someone would have had to help her, on the way to wherever they were taking us—feed her, help her drink. She would have had to offer favors to the guards to get them to do it. None of us would have done it."

I am dangerous too, sometimes.

That morning I was an antipersonnel mine, a butterfly bomb, unexploded and ticking, and he touched the fuse.

I don't actually remember what happened. I don't remember attacking him. But the skin of my knuckles is torn where my fist connected with his broken teeth. Mitraillette says they thought I was going to try to dig his eyes out with my fingers.

I do remember three people holding me back, and I remember screaming at the boy, "You wouldn't have helped her EAT AND DRINK? SHE'D HAVE DONE IT FOR YOU!"

Then in panic, because I was making so much noise, they sat on me again. But as soon as they let me go I was back on top of him. "I FREED YOU! You would still be IN CHAINS and packed in a stinking freight wagon LIKE A COW by now if it wasn't for me! *You wouldn't have helped another prisoner EAT AND DRINK?*"

"Käthe, Käthe!" Mitraillette, weeping, tried to take my face between her hands to comfort me and shut me up. "Käthe, *arrête*—stop, stop! *Tu dois*—you must! Wait—*attends*—"

She held a tin cup of cold coffee laced with cognac up to my mouth—helped me. Helped me drink.

That was the first time she KO'd me. It takes thirty minutes for the drug to work. Suppose I'm lucky they didn't hit me over the head with a bicycle to speed it up.

When I woke up they made me go with the chauffeur up to the villa. I felt like hell warmed over, stupid and faintly sick and absolutely famished, and I think I probably wouldn't have cared if the old woman who lived there had turned me over to the police. ISN'T THAT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU KILL YOUR BEST FRIEND?

But no, the chauffeur took me into a dark and elegant oak-paneled hall, and the woman came to meet me—she is one of those beautiful, porcelain-perfect people of the last century, with snow-white hair done up in exactly Julie's chignon—I noticed that. She took my hand without saying a thing and led me upstairs into a bathroom the size of a ballroom, where there was a dead-boiling bath drawn up and waiting, and she sort of

pushed me into the room and left me there to get on with it.

I thought about putting Etienne's pocketknife to use by slitting my wrists, but it seemed rather unfair on the frail, heroic woman whose house it was, and also—ALSO I WANT REVENGE, BLAST IT

So I had a bath. Which, I confess, was heavenly. Dried off in a huge fluffy towel obviously left for me, feeling sinful. And a bit unreal.

The old woman—I should say elderly, not old. She is a refined sort of person—she met me at the door when I came out. I was clean underneath, but my hill-walking trousers were caked with mud and my wet hair was standing on end and I felt shabby as a street urchin. Didn't seem to matter—once more she took me by the hand, and this time led me to a small parlor where she had a fire going, and a kettle on the hob. She made me sit down on the frayed silk of her eighteenth century settee while she made me a little supper, with bread and honey and coffee, and tiny yellow apples, and a boiled egg.

The tray went on a small marble-topped side table and she knocked the top of the egg off for me with a pretty silver spoon as though I were a baby and needed feeding. Then she dipped the spoon into the egg and the yolk came up golden like the sun popping out of a cloud bank. It made me think instantly of eating supper with the Craig Castle Irregulars the first time I went there. Then I realized that Julie and I had never been there at the same time and now we never would, and I bent over and began to cry.

The old woman, who didn't know who I was, and whose life was in danger just because she had me in her house, sat down beside me on the old settee and stroked my hair with thin, wrinkled hands, and I sobbed hopelessly in her arms for nearly an hour.

After a while she got up and said, "I will make another egg for you, three minutes only—how the English like it. This one is cold now."

She did another and she made me eat it while she ate the cold one herself.

When I left to go back to the stables she kissed me on both

cheeks and said, “We share a terrible burden, *chérie*. We are alike.”

I am not sure what she meant.

I kissed her cheeks, too, and said, “*Merci, Madame. Merci mille fois.*”

A thousand thanks is not really enough. But I haven’t anything else to give her.

Her gardens are full of roses—sprawling, old tangled bushes, quite a few of them autumn-flowering damasks with their last flowers still nodding and drooping in the rain. The old woman is the one the circuit is named for. Mitraillette says that before the war the woman was quite a noted horticulturalist—the chauffeur/groundskeeper is in fact a skilled gardener—and she has bred and named a few of the roses herself. I hadn’t noticed the roses when we arrived last night, or even walking up to the villa in daylight in a stupor, but I noticed them on my way back to the stables after my bath. The flowers are sodden and dying in the December rain, but the sturdy bushes are still alive, and will be beautiful someday in the spring, if the German army doesn’t mow them down like the ones in the Ormaie town square. For no good reason they made me think of Paris, and ever since then I have had that song stuck in my head yet again.

None of the rest of us was given a bath or a hot softboiled egg, though cold hard-boiled ones were passed around. I think I was sent up to the house as a diversion while they were getting rid of the lad I’d tried to murder that morning and the other chained man. Anyway, I never saw them again. I don’t know how they got their leg irons off, or where they went, or if they are safe. I hope so. I really do.

Everybody else left in stages over the next two days. Mitraillette says it is actually safer to travel by day than at night if you are a fugitive, since daytime is when people are out and about and there isn’t any curfew—don’t think I’d realized that, since I am always trying to get on a plane that arrives after midnight at some distant airfield.

She and I and the Rosalie owner were delivered home by the rose lady’s chauffeur in her own car—we thought we ought

to leave the old Rosalie there for a bit longer in case the Nazis come back to check on the garage again. The bridge still hasn't been fixed, and except for the German soldiers we killed, every one of the bodies is still lying there in the rain, with guards posted over them to keep anyone from trying to bury them. *Fifteen people* lying there. I haven't seen it. We couldn't drive that way anyway as the bridge was out. They'll have to clear the road when they get the bridge fixed, but I have a sick and certain feeling they will just pile everybody alongside the road to remind us not to try again. Julie, Oh lovely Julie,

JULIE

I am going to drink this stuff now and try to sleep again, but I should put down that I have a project to work on when I wake up—while Mitraillette and I were gone, a friend of Maman Thibaut's who runs a laundry service dropped off a bag of clean *German-made* chemises labeled "Käthe Habicht," and hidden underneath them was a huge pile of paper that I have to go through. I don't know what it is—haven't had the heart to look—but it must be from Engel again. Amélie peeked and discovered that the pages are numbered, so she's put them all in order for me, but it's in English and she couldn't read it. It's still hidden in the laundry bag beneath my "anonymously" donated new collection of underclothes. I jolly well don't feel like reading anything Engel has sent me anymore tonight, but tomorrow is Sunday and there will be croissants with the coffee and I expect it will still be raining.

It is not Engel's writing

It is Julie's

I've not finished reading yet. I've scarcely started. It is *hundreds* of pages long, half of it on little bits of card. Maman Thibaut just keeps making me more coffee and the girls are keeping a good watch on the road and the back lane. I can't stop. I don't know if there's any urgency or not—Engel may need the papers back, as there is an official-looking number printed at the end in red ink, and a horrible execution order on Gestapo stationery attached by the evil Nikolaus Ferber. Not an order, I mean, only a recommendation—according to Engel's translation. But I think it was in the process of being carried out when we stopped the bus.

I can tell when Julie's been crying. Not just because she says so, but because the writing goes all smeary and the paper crinkles. Her tears, dried on these pages, are mixed up with mine making them wet again. I have cried so hard over this that I am beginning to feel stupid. They *did* show her those blasted pictures. And she *did* give them code—eleven sets of encoding poems, passwords, and frequencies. Eleven code sets—eleven dummy code sets, ONE FOR EACH OF OUR DUMMY WIRELESSES, one for each of the “*onze radios*” we planted in the wrecked Lysander. Those pictures were a gift. She could have told them *so much*, she knew SO MUCH, and all she gave them was fake code.

She never even told them my code name—though they must have wondered. She never told them Käthe Habicht's name, which might have given me away. She never told them ANYTHING

Names names names. How does she do it? Cattercup—Stratfield—SWINLEY??? Newbery College? How does she *do* it? She makes it sound like she is *so cut up* to be giving them this information, and it's all just bumpf out of her head. She never told them ANYTHING. I don't think she's given them the right name of any airfield in the whole of Britain, except Maidsend and Buscot, which of course were where she was stationed. They could have easily checked. It's all so close to truth, and so glib—her aircraft identification is rather good, considering what a fuss she makes about it. It makes me think of the first day I met her, giving those directions in German. So cool and crisp, such authority—suddenly she *really was* a radio operator, a German radio operator, she was *so good* at faking it. Or when I told her to be Jamie, how she just suddenly turned into *Jamie*.

This confession of hers is rotten with error—I did my Civil Air Guard training at Barton, not “Oakway,” and the fog line at so-called Oakway is electric, not gas. It wasn't a Spitfire the first time I flew to Craig Castle, of course it was a BEAUFORT, and she jolly well knew that! Though I have ferried Spitfires to “Deeside.” I suppose she truly didn't want to draw attention to any real names. She calls the RAF Maidsend Squadron Leader “Creighton,” and she knows perfectly well his proper name is Leland North. Creighton is the name of the Colonel in *Kim*. I know, because Julie made me read it—partly, I am dead sure, as a warning about how both of us were being fine-tuned for the war machine by that Bloody Machiavellian Intelligence Officer whose real name she also knows perfectly well.

I don't at all remember the story about her grandmother's sister shooting her husband. Of course Julie would have had to fudge a lot of our conversations to keep the flow going, none of them run exactly as I remember. Mostly it's all there and I recognize it, only I don't think she ever told me that story. I have no memory of it at all.

It's eerie and unbearable. It's as though she's trying to tell me what she wanted me to do. But she couldn't have known what was going to happen, or even that I'd read this. She thought I was dead. So it must not have been aimed at me, but then—why tell it?

What's strange about the whole thing is that although it's riddled with nonsense, altogether it's *true*—Julie's told our story, mine and hers, our friendship, so truthfully. It is *us*. We even had the same dream at the same time. How could we have had the same dream at the same time? How can something so wonderful and mysterious be true? But it is.

And this, even more wonderful and mysterious, is also true: when I read it, when I read what Julie's written, she is instantly alive again, whole and undamaged. With her words in my mind while I'm reading, she is as real as I am. Gloriously daft, drop-dead charming, full of bookish nonsense and foul language, brave and generous. She's *right here*. Afraid and exhausted, alone, but *fighting*. Flying in silver moonlight in a plane that can't be landed, stuck in the climb—alive, alive, ALIVE.

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C d B = Château de Bordeaux

H d V = Hôtel de Ville [town hall]

O.HdV.A. 1872 B. No. 4 CdB

O = Ormaie? perhaps A/Annals? Archives B/Box/Boîte
1872 - could be year, Archives 1872 box no 4

I SEE IT

ORMAIE TOWN HALL ARCHIVES 1872 BOX No. 4
CHÂTEAU DE BORDEAUX

We have them. WE HAVE GOT THEM.

✓ Our prison cells are only hotel bedrooms, but we are guarded like royalty. And also, there are dogs.

✓ these cellars are empty because they are not secure

✓ There are a number of service lifts, dumbwaiters for hauling trays upstairs in addition to the great big one for loading crates and things from the main street

There's more—I know there's more—Engel's underlined all the instructions in red—red's her color, Julie said. The pages are numbered and dated in red too. Julie mentioned Engel had to number the pages. They've created it between them, Julia Beaufort-Stuart and Anna Engel, and they've given it to me to use—the code's not in order, doesn't need to be. No wonder she was so determined to finish it—

Ugh, there is SO MUCH PAPER HERE

here it is—

✓ there was an air raid and everybody scrambled to the shelters as usual...for two hours

✓ “C d B” = Château de Bordeaux

✓ as with all the prisoners' rooms, my window has been boarded shut

✓ The Gestapo use the ground floor and two mezzanines for their own accommodation and offices

✓ “H d V” picked out in red = Hôtel de Ville
✓ through the cellars and out to a little stone courtyard
[where there is] a gate to the lower lane

We can get in through the cellars, front and back. There is an entrance in the lower lane at the back and a loading lift through the street at the front. The cellars are not secure and they use the bedrooms as cells. During air raids the whole place is left unguarded apart from the dogs. We will have up to two hours. We can pull the fuses, disable the generator, and fill the dumbwaiters with Explosive 808 when we leave.

Julie put in the great-aunt story because she thought we might have to blow the place up with her inside. That there might be no other way. And she wanted us to do it anyway.

But we won't have to leave any of the prisoners inside. We can break into the rooms with crowbars and lockpicks and get everyone out. The official-looking numbers at the end in red ink are a CITY ARCHIVE REFERENCE. It will be the ARCHITECT'S DRAWINGS for the Château de Bordeaux. We will have a map of the building.

It is coming down. We are still a sensational team.

SOE LONDON-W/T MSG, DRAFT FORENCODING
Regret report your organizer code name
Paul of Damask Circuit and Flt Officer
Julia Beaufort-Stuart both killed in
action 1 Dec 1943 STOP request RAF
operational flight w/in France route
overhead Ormaie this full moon Sat 11 Dec
to create diversion enabling Operation
Verity

OceanofPDF.com

La Cadette collected the drawings. It turns out *anyone* can go digging in the Ormaie Town Hall archives. It's like Nazi contempt for the Occupied country taken to extremes—as though they welcome the locals to come and ransack their own heritage so no one else need bother. You get searched when you enter the building, of course, but not on the way out, and they didn't even *look* at Amélie's ID—she said she was working on a project for school, easy peasy. She was supposed to say she was verifying a boundary of the Thibaut farm, but when she saw how easy it would be to get in and out, she made up a simpler story on the spot. She is *so sharp*.

It took her twenty minutes during her school dinner break, and she left the pages for me to collect so she wouldn't get caught carrying them around.

It was probably a mistake to tell her to leave them in Engel's *cachette*. I think of it as mine, but it's Engel's. Also, I think we are supposed to avoid using cafés. I wish I'd been trained for this. It didn't matter in the end, but oh how my stomach turned over when I walked in and found Engel sitting at the table.

I started to walk past to another table, smiling my stupid plastic smile—makes me feel like a zombie this week—but she beckoned abruptly.

“*Salut, Käthe.*” She patted the chair next to hers. When I sat down she stubbed out her cigarette and lit another two and gave me one. Somehow it was the most heart-stopping thing I have ever done, touching my own lips with this cigarette that had touched Anna Engel's lips a second earlier. I feel like—I know her so intimately, after reading Julie's confession. She must feel the same way about me, though I don't suppose I scare her as much.

“*Et ton amie, ça va?*” she asked casually—How's your friend?

I looked away, swallowed, couldn't maintain the plastic smile. Took a drag on the cigarette and choked, haven't smoked for a while and never those French fags. After a minute or so she figured out that what I wasn't saying was not a happy

ending.

She swore softly in French, a single violent word of disappointment. Then paused and asked, "*Elle est morte?*"

I nodded. Yes, she's dead.

"*Viens*," Engel said, scraping back her chair. "*Allons. Viens marcher avec moi, j'ai des choses à te dire.*"

If she had been about to cart me off to prison, I don't think I could have refused—Come for a walk, I've got things to tell you? No choice.

I stood up again in Engel's cloud of smoke—hadn't even ordered anything, just as well as it always panics me to have to speak French to strangers. Engel patted the thick wad of paper folded next to her ashtray, reminding me. I picked it up and shoved it in my jacket pocket along with Käthe's ID.

It was midafternoon, streets not too busy, and Engel clicked into English almost right away—popping back into French only when we passed anybody. It's dead weird talking to her in English. She sounds like a Yank. Her accent is American and she's pretty fluent. Suppose Penn did tell me she'd been to university in Chicago.

We came around the corner of the back lane and into the Place des Hirondelles, the town hall square, full of armored vehicles and bored-looking sentries.

"I've got most of an hour," Engel said. "My dinner break. Not here, though."

I nodded and followed. She kept talking the whole time—we must have looked dead casual, a couple of chums having a walk and a smoke together. She doesn't wear a uniform—she's just an employee, she doesn't even have a rank. We walked across the cobbles in front of the town hall.

"She was crossing the street, right here, and she looked the wrong way." Engel blew out a fierce cloud of smoke. "What a stupid place to make a mistake like that, right in the middle of La Place des Hirondelles! There is *always* someone watching here—the town hall on one side and the Gestapo on the other."

"It was the Thibauts' van, wasn't it?" I said miserably. "The van that nearly hit her." A French van full of French chickens, that's what she'd said, in the first few pages she wrote.

"I don't know. The van was gone by the time I got here. I'm sure that driver didn't want to get tangled up in an arrest. All Ormaie looks the other way when there's a beating in the Place des Hirondelles—another Jew dragged out of hiding, or some idiot throwing manure at the office windows."

She glanced up at the offending windows—no dead bodies hanging there this week, thank goodness.

"She put up a hell of a fight, your friend," Engel said. "She bit a policeman. They got me to come and chloroform her, to knock her out, you know? There were four officers holding her down when I came running across the square with the chloroform, and she was still struggling. She tried to bite me, too. When the fumes finally overwhelmed her it was like watching a light go out—"

"I know. I know."

We were out of the square now. We turned to look at each other at exactly the same moment. Her eyes are amazing.

"We've turned this place into a real shit-hole," she said. "There were roses in that square when I was first sent here. Now it's nothing but mud and trucks. I think of her *every single time* I cross those cobbles, three times a day. I hate it." She looked away. "Come on. We can walk along the riverfront for about half a kilometer. Have you been?"

"No."

"It's still pretty."

She lit another cigarette. It was her third in about five minutes. Can't imagine how she manages to afford them all or even where she gets them—women are no longer allowed to buy cigarettes in Ormaie.

"I've chloroformed people before. It's something they expect of me, part of my job—I'm a chemist, I studied pharmaceuticals in America. But I've never despised myself so much as I did that day—she was so small and—"

She stumbled over her words and I had to bite the inside of my cheeks to keep from crying.

"So fierce, so *beautiful*, it was like breaking a hawk's wings, stopping up a clear spring with bricks—digging up roses to make a space to park your tank. Pointless and ugly. She was just

—blazing with life and defiance one moment, then the next moment nothing but a senseless shell lying on her face in the gutter—”

“I KNOW,” I whispered.

She glanced over at me curiously, frowning, sweeping my face with her sharp, pale eyes.

“Do you so?”

“She was my *best friend*,” I said through my teeth.

Anna Engel nodded. “*Ja*, I know. Ach, you must hate me.”

“No. No, I’m sorry. Tell me. Please.”

“Here’s the river,” Anna said, and we crossed another street. There was a railing all along the riverbank and we stood leaning against it. Once there were elm trees lining both sides of the Poitou here—nothing but stumps now, because over the last three years they’ve all been cut down for firewood. But she was right—the row of historic houses on the opposite bank is still pretty.

Anna took a deep breath and spoke again.

“When she passed out I turned her over so I could check to see if she was armed, and she was clutching her balled-up silk scarf in her fist. She must have been clinging to it all through the battle, and when she lost consciousness her fingers went lax. I wasn’t supposed to search her properly, that’s someone else’s job, but I wondered what she’d been protecting so doggedly in her closed fist—a suicide tablet, maybe—and I lifted the scarf out of her open hand—”

She held her own palm out against the railing, demonstrating.

“On her palm there was a smear of ink. On the scarf was the perfectly reversed imprint of an Ormaie Town Hall archive reference number. She’d written the number on her palm and tried to rub it out with the scarf when she was caught.

“I spat on the scarf—as though in contempt of her, you understand?—and wadded it into a ball, which I pressed back into her hand. But I rubbed the damp silk hard against her palm to blot out the numbers and closed her limp fingers around it, and all anyone ever found there was an ink-stained wad of cloth

and *no one ever asked her about it* because she'd been filling out forms in the ration office just before she'd been caught, under the pretence of an errand for some made-up elderly grandmother, and her fingers were covered with ink anyway."

A flight of hopeful pigeons settled on the pavement around our feet. I am always so amazed at the way they flare and touch down—never a bounce or a prang. No one teaches them, they do it instinctively. Flying rats, but how beautifully they touch down.

"How did you know what she wanted the number for?" I asked at last.

"She told me," Anna said.

"No."

"She told me. At the end, after she'd finished. She was writing nonsense. I took hold of her pen to stop her, and she let go without a fight. She was tired. We'd worn her down. She looked up at me without hope—there'd be no more excuses now, no more reprieves. Ferber's orders are all supposed to be cloaked in secrecy, but we both knew what he'd tell von Linden to do with her. Where they'd send her."

Anna hit the back of her hand lightly against the railing for emphasis and demonstrated with her cigarette, holding it as though it were a pen.

"In the palm of my own hand I wrote: 72 B4 CdB."

She took a drag on the cigarette-pen, steadying herself.

"She was the only one who could see it. Before the ink dried I closed my fingers and smeared the figures to an illegible blur. I picked up the pages she'd finished with and shuffled them together.

"That's *mine*,' she said.

"I knew she wasn't talking about the pile of loose paper and card I was stacking. She was talking about the archive reference I'd written in my hand.

"What use is it to you?" I asked.

"No use,' she answered. 'Not anymore. But if I could...'

"What would you do with it?' I asked quietly. 'What should I do with it?'

“She narrowed her eyes like a cornered rat. ‘Set fire to it and blow this place to blazes. That would be the best thing to do with it.’

“I held her stack of paper tight against my chest. Her instructions. She looked up at me with that challenging, accusing squint, you know?

“‘Anna the Avenging Angel,’ she said, and then she laughed at me. She *laughed*. She said, ‘Well, it’s your problem now.’”

Anna threw her finished cigarette into the Poitou and lit another.

“You should go home, Käthe,” she said suddenly. “This English girl who sells motorbikes to Jews, this Maddie Brodatt—she’ll get you in trouble. You should go home to Alsace tomorrow, if you can, and let Maddie take her own chances.”

Get Käthe out of the picture before anything happens—that makes sense. It’ll be far safer for the Thibauts. Although I hate to go back into hiding. Tomorrow night I’ll be back in the barn loft, and it’s even colder there now than it was in October.

“What about you?” I asked.

“I’m going back to Berlin. I applied for a transfer weeks ago, when we started interrogating her and that pathetic French kid. *God*.” She shuddered, smoking furiously. “What shitty jobs they give me. Ravensbrück and Ormaie. At least when I used to requisition pharmaceuticals for Natzweiler I didn’t have to see what they did with them. Anyway, I’m only here till Christmas now.”

“You might be safer here. We’re bombing Berlin,” I said. “We’ve been bombing it for nearly two weeks.”

“*Ja*, I know,” she said. “We listen to the BBC too. The Berlin Blitz. Well, we probably deserve it.”

“I don’t think anyone deserves it, really.”

She turned suddenly and gave me a hard look with those pale, glass-green eyes. “Except the Castle of Butchers, right?”

“What do *you* think?” I challenged angrily.

She shrugged and turned to head back to the Place des Hirondelles. She was out of time.

You know who she reminded me of—this is crazy. She

reminded me of Eva Seiler.

Not of Julie normally, not really, but of Julie when she was angry. Made me think of her telling me the story of her mock interrogation under SOE training, in flat violation of the Official Secrets Act—the only time I can ever remember her chain smoking the way Engel does, and swearing like a dockworker. *“And six hours later I knew I couldn’t take it anymore, but I was just damned if I’d give in and say my name. So I pretended to faint and they all panicked and went running for a doctor. Bloody fucking bastards.”*

Engel and I didn’t say much on the way back. She offered me another cigarette, and I had a moment of rebellion.

“You never gave any to Julie.”

“Never gave any to Julie!” Engel gave an astonished bark of laughter. “I damn well gave her half my salary in cigarettes, greedy little Scottish savage! She nearly bankrupted me. Smoked her way through all five years of your pilot’s career!”

“She never said! She never even hinted! Not once!”

“What do you think would have happened to her,” Engel said coolly, “if she had written this down? What would have happened to me?”

She held out the offered cigarette.

I took it.

We walked quietly for a while—two chums having a smoke together. Aye, right, miss.

“How did you get Julie’s story?” I asked suddenly.

“Von Linden’s landlady did it for me. He had it at the desk in his room and while he was out she dropped the whole thing into a bag of linens to be washed. Told him she’d used it to light the kitchen fire—it *does* look like a pile of rubbish, all those damned recipe cards and the scratched-out forms.”

“He *believed* that?” I asked, astonished.

She shrugged. “No choice. She’ll suffer for it—milk and eggs cut to a limited supply strictly for her lodgers—the whole family under curfew in their own house, so they can’t sit up in the evening, bedtime straight after supper. She has to do all last night’s dishes in the morning before she makes breakfast for the

guests. The children have all been strapped.”

“Oh NO!” I burst out.

“They’ve got off lightly. The children could have been taken away. Or the woman sent to prison. But von Linden’s a bit soft on children.”

I’d left my bicycle in a street leading to the square. Just as I was taking hold of the handlebars, Anna put her hand over mine. She pressed something heavy and cold and thin into my palm.

It is a key.

“They asked me to bring some soap to scrub her up with when she had that interview,” Anna said. “Something scented and pretty. I had some I’d gotten in America, you know how you save things sometimes, and I managed to make a print in it of the key for the service door at the back. This is a new one. I think you have everything you need now.”

I squeezed her hand fiercely.

“*Danke*, Anna.”

“Take care, Käthe.”

At that moment, as though she’d called him up by saying his name, Amadeus von Linden himself turned the corner of the street, walking toward the Place des Hirondelles.

“*Guten Tag*, Fräulein Engel,” he said cordially, and she dropped her cigarette and crushed it out with her foot and straightened her back and her coat collar all in a rush of practiced panic. I dropped my cigarette too—seemed the right thing to do. She said something to him about me—she linked arms with me quickly, as though we were old chums, and I heard her say Käthe’s name, and the Thibauts’. Introducing me, probably. He held out his hand.

I stood there absolutely frozen for about five seconds.

“Hauptsturmführer von Linden,” Anna prompted gravely.

I put the key in my coat pocket with the architect’s drawings and my forged ID.

“Hauptsturmführer von Linden,” I repeated, and shook hands with him, smiling like a lunatic.

I’ve never had a “mortal enemy.” I’ve never known what it

meant, even. Something out of Sherlock Holmes and Shakespeare. How can my whole being, my whole life up to this point, be matched to one man in deadly combat?

He stood gazing through me, distracted by his own colossal problems. It never occurred to him that I could tell him the secret coordinates of the Moon Squadron's airfield, or give him the names of half a dozen Resistance operatives here in his own city, or that I was planning to send his entire administration up in flames in five days. It never occurred to him I was in every way his enemy, his opponent, I am *everything* he is battling against, I am British and Jewish, in the ATA I am a woman doing a man's work at a man's rate of pay, and my work is to deliver the aircraft that will destroy his regime. It never occurred to him that I knew he'd watched and made notes while my best friend sat tied to a chair in her underwear having holes burnt in her wrists and throat, that I knew he'd commanded it, that I *knew* that in spite of his own misgivings he'd followed orders like a coward and shipped her off to be used as an experimental lab rat until her heart collapsed—it never occurred to him that now he was looking at his master, at the one person in all the world who held his fate right between her palms—me, in patched hand-me-downs and untrimmed hair and idiot smile—and that my hatred for him is pure and black and unforgiving. And that I don't believe in God, but if I did, *if I did*, it would be the God of Moses, angry and demanding and OUT FOR REVENGE, and

It doesn't matter whether I feel sorry for him or not. It was Julie's job and now it's mine.

He said something polite to me, his drawn face neutral. I glanced at Anna, who nodded once.

"*Ja, mein Hauptsturmführer,*" I said through clenched teeth. Anna gave me a sharp kick in the ankle and leaped in to make an excuse on my behalf. I put my hand in my pocket and felt the crackle of thick paper seventy years old, and the new key weighing heavy in the seam of the threadbare woven wool.

They nodded to me and walked on together. Poor Anna. I liked her very much.

Käthe's gone back to Alsace and I'm waiting for the moon again—everything in place and we've had confirmation of a bomber flypast planned for Sat. night—whether or not Op. Verity is successful they're sending a Lysander for me, at the field I found, on Sunday or Monday—all of it weather permitting and, of course, assuming we can collect the Rosalie. Jolly difficult to sleep and when I do I just have nightmares about flying burning planes with faulty chokes, being forced to cut Julie's throat with Etienne's pocketknife, etc. If I wake up yelling three times a night there's not much point in trying to hide. I am flying alone.

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Burning burning burning burning—

*Behead me or hang me
That will never fear me
I'll burn Auchindoon
Ere my life leave me*

Ormaie is still on fire in my head. But I am in England.
I am back in England.

You know—perhaps I will be court-martialed. Perhaps I will be tried for murder and hanged. But all I feel is *relief*—relief—as though I've been underwater and breathing through a straw for the last two months, and now I have my head in the air again. Gulping in long, sweet lungfuls of it, cold damp December air, smelling of petrol and coal smoke and freedom.

The irony is, I'm not free. I am under house arrest here in The Cottage at the Moon Squadron aerodrome. I am locked in my usual bedroom, the one I used to share with Julie, and I have a guard beneath my window, too. Don't care—feels like freedom. If they hang me they will do it cleanly, break my neck instantly, and I will deserve it. They won't make me betray anyone. They won't make me watch it happening to anyone else. They won't incinerate my body and turn it into soap. They'll make sure Grandad knows what happened.

Julie's Bloody Machiavellian Intelligence Officer has been sent for so he can interview me. I trust he will do it without resorting to a soldering iron and ice water and pins.

Cups of tea, perhaps. I dread my interrogation for a number of reasons, but I'm not afraid of it.

Can't believe how safe I feel here. Don't care if I *am* a prisoner. Just feel *so safe*.

INCIDENT REPORT N°2

Successful sabotage and destruction of Gestapo Headquarters,
Château de Bordeaux Building, Ormaie, France—11 Dec. 1943

My reports are so rubbish.

I know the Allied Forces are planning a proper invasion of Occupied Europe with tanks and planes and gliders full of commandos, but when I think of France being liberated I picture an avenging army arriving on bicycles. That is how we all came into Ormaie on Saturday night, all of us from different directions, all with our baskets and panniers crammed with homemade bombs. The sirens didn't go till after curfew and we all did a *lot* of nervous skulking—I bet there was an explosive bicycle behind every single newspaper kiosk in Ormaie—I myself lay underneath a lorry for at least two hours with one of Mitraillette's mates. Thank goodness for Jamie's boots.

We had to blow the back gate open—bit of a risk, but there was no one about once the air raid was under way, and of course we had the key to let ourselves in after that. It was the blasted *dogs* I was dreading coming face-to-face with more than anything else. Poor old dogs, not really their fault. I needn't have worried, as Mitraillette was merciless.

I feel like I should write in objective detail. But there's not much to report. We were fast and efficient, we knew exactly where to go—we operated in teams of 2 or 3 and each team had its own specific section and assignment—shoot the dogs, unlock the doors, corral the prisoners, unload the bombs. Get the hell out. I'd say we were in and out in half an hour. Certainly no more than three quarters of an hour—not too many prisoners to release, as it's not technically a prison—17 in all. No women. But—

I did this on purpose, I assigned myself and my partner to free whoever was in Julie's cell. I hadn't really thought about what it would mean to have to walk through that interrogation room it is attached to—

Thankfully there was no one there, but *oh*—I can hardly bear to think about it. *How it stank*. It makes me retch just remembering. We walked in and it hit us in the face and for a moment I couldn't do anything except gasp and try not to be sick, and the French lad with me staggered a bit and grabbed me to support himself. Of course we were operating by the light

of electric torches, so we couldn't really see anything—dim outlines of institutional furniture, steel chairs and tables and a couple of cabinets, nothing obviously sinister, but *oh*, it was the most sick-making, hellish stench I've ever breathed—like a full privy but also ammonia and rotten meat and burnt hair and vomit and—no, it was *indescribable* and it's making me want to throw up again writing about it. It wasn't till afterward that I even thought about Julie having to live with that smell for eight weeks—no wonder they scrubbed her up before letting her meet Penn—anyway we didn't think about *anything* but getting out of there as fast as we could without suffocating. Pulled our coats up over our noses and got to work on the door of Julie's cell, and we dragged its bewildered inhabitant out with us through that horrible room and into the corridor.

The man we'd rescued didn't understand when we talked to him in French. He turned out to be *Jamaican*—a rear gunner in the RAF, shot down last week—perhaps they'd been hoping to get Allied invasion plans out of him? He's in good shape, they hadn't got to work on him yet, and though he'd barely eaten for a week he managed to carry out a lad whose knees had been broken—

He is a lovely man, the Jamaican, and he is here. Well, I don't think he's here in The Cottage, I think he's been sent off to the proper RAF aerodrome, but I mean that he flew back to England with me. Hid with me, too, in the Thibauts' barn. He is from Kingston and has three kiddies, all girls. He followed me at a trot down the grand staircase of that dreadful, ruined hotel, with the silent, suffering boy whose legs were broken clinging to his back—me with an electric torch in one hand and Paul's Colt .32 in the other, navigating by a memorized map as usual.

We all met to count up everyone in the courtyard where the guillotine is. Last one out turned the generator back on—we had attached a timer to it. Once it was on we had twenty minutes. A couple of Lancasters were still circling overhead, daring the searchlights, and the night was noisy with halfhearted flak—a lot of the antiaircraft guns are manned by local lads, conscripted to beef up the Occupation army, and their hearts aren't really in it when they fire at Allied planes. Twenty minutes to get out of the Place des Hirondelles, and

perhaps another hour to get into hiding before the all-clear.

Had to find someone close by to take the injured kid, Mitraillette managed that, and the rest of us scarpered on bicycles and on foot. My Jamaican rear gunner and I took a tortuous route over a series of garden walls to avoid the checkpoint on the road. But we were outside Ormaie and cycling tandem, me standing on the bar at the back and him pedaling because he was so much heavier than me, when the explosion came.

It gave us such a shock we toppled over. We didn't feel it—we were just startled witless by the bang. For a couple of minutes I sat in the road laughing like a maniac, full moon and fire lighting everything, and then my rescued rear gunner very gently made me get back on the bicycle and we set off again with Ormaie at our backs.

“Which way, Miss Kittyhawk?”

“Left at the fork. Just call me Kittyhawk.”

“Is that your name?”

“No.”

“Oh,” he said. “You are not French, either.”

“No, I'm English.”

“What you doing in France, Kittyhawk?”

“Same as you—I'm a shot-down airman.”

“You are pulling my leg!”

“I am not. I am a First Officer with the Air Transport Auxiliary. And I bet no one believes you, either, when you tell them you're a rear gunner in the Royal Air Force.”

“You're right about that, gal,” he said with feeling. “It's a white man's world.”

I held on tight around his waist, and hoped he wasn't as much of a lech as Paul or I would have to shoot him, too, when we were stuck in the Thibauts' barn together by ourselves.

“What's troubling you, Kittyhawk?” he asked softly.

“What's making you cry so hard? Good riddance to that place.”

I was hanging on and leaning on his shoulder now, sobbing into his back. “They had my best friend in there—you were in her cell. She was there for two months.”

He pedaled silently, digesting this. At last he said, “She die there?”

“No,” I said. “Not there. But she’s dead now anyway.”

Suddenly I could feel through his jacket that he was crying too, shaking a little with silent, muffled sobs, just like me.

“My best mate’s dead too,” he said softly. “He was our pilot. Flew that plane into the ground—kept it flying straight and level so the rest of us could bail out after we were hit.”

Oh—only now that I am writing it down, only now I see that’s exactly what I did, too.

Funny—it seemed the most heroic thing in the world when he told me about his friend, dead amazing that anyone could be that brave and selfless. But I didn’t feel heroic when I did it—just too scared to jump.

We rode through the moonlight with the flames of Ormaie behind us, and neither one of us stopped crying until we put the bicycle away.

We slept back-to-back in that tiny loft space in the old half-timbered barn for two nights—well, one and a half nights, really—played 21 for hours with a deck of dreadful obscene playing cards I’d nicked from one of Etienne Thibaut’s hidey-holes. On Monday, yesterday, last night I mean, we got collected by the rose lady’s chauffeur and taken to collect the Rosalie for our trip to the pickup airfield.

This was the third time the Thibauts all hugged and kissed me good-bye—Amélie creating a fuss, Maman trying to make a present of a dozen silver spoons—I just *couldn’t*! And Mitraillette with tears in her eyes, first I’ve ever seen her choked up like that over something that didn’t involve blood.

She didn’t come with us this time. I hope—

I wish I knew how to pray for them all. I just wish I knew.

The Rosalie was waiting for us in the driveway of the big house on the Poitou riverbank. It was still light when we got there, so as not to get the chauffeur in trouble, and while they were putting the other car away the old woman with the white hair like Julie’s took me by the hand, just as she’d done that first

terrible day after, and led me without a word through her cold garden.

Down along the river was a pile of roses, a *huge* pile of damask roses, the autumn-flowering ones. She'd cut every single rose left in her garden and piled them there.

"They let us bury everyone at last," she told me. "Most are up there by the bridge. But I was so angry about those poor girls, those two lovely young girls left lying there in the dirt for four days with the rats and the crows at them! It's not right. It is not *natural*. So when we buried the others I had the men bring the girls here—"

Julie is buried in her great-aunt's rose garden, wrapped in her grandmother's first Communion veil, and covered in a mound of damask roses.

Of course that is the name of her circuit, too—Damask.

I still don't know her great-aunt's name. How is that possible? I knew it was her all suddenly, it just came to me in a flash—when she said that she'd used the veils that she and her sister had worn at their first Communion, I remembered that Julie's grandmother was from Ormaie, and then I remembered the great-aunt story, and what she'd said to me about sharing a terrible burden, and it all clicked and I knew who she was.

But I didn't tell her—I didn't have the heart to tell her. She didn't seem to know it was Julie—of course Katharina Habicht would have kept her real identity hidden to avoid compromising anyone. I suppose I should have said something. But I just *couldn't do it*.

Now I am in tears *again*.

Have heard a car pull up, so they may be sending for me soon, but I want to finish telling about getting out of France—which will probably also make me cry—what's new?

Even started off blubbing just listening to the radio message that let us know they were going to pick me up that night: "After a while, all children tell the truth"—in French it's "*Assez bientôt, tous les enfants disent la vérité*." I am sure they stuck the word *vérité* in there on purpose, but they couldn't have known it

would make me think of the last page Julie wrote—*I have told the truth*, over and over.

The whole routine is so familiar now, like a recurring dream. Dark field, flashing lights, Lysander wings against the moon. Except it gets *colder* each time. No mud this time, despite last week's rain—ground's all frozen solid. Dead smooth landing, the plane didn't go 'round even once—I like to think this is partly down to *my* excellent field selection—made the trade-off of goods and passengers in just under fifteen minutes. *That's how it should be done.*

My Jamaican rear gunner had already climbed on board, and I had one hand on the ladder to follow him up when the pilot yelled down at me, "OI, KITTYHAWK! You going to fly us out of here?"

Who else but Jamie Beaufort-Stuart—just—who else?

"Come on, swap seats with me," he shouted. "You flew yourself here, you can fly yourself home."

Can't believe he made the offer and I can't believe I took him up on it—all so wrong. Should have been retested after the crash-landing, at least.

"But you didn't want me to fly OUT in the first place!" I bawled.

"I was worried about you being in France, not worried about your flying! Bad enough one of you was going, without losing you BOTH. Anyway, if we get fired on you're better at crash-landings than I am—"

"Court-martial, they'll court-martial both of us—"

"What tosh, you're a CIVILIAN! You've not been in danger of court-martial since you left the WAAFs in 1941. The worst the ATA can do is dismiss you, and they'll do that anyway if they're going to do it. COME UP!"

The engine was idling. He had the parking brake on and there was just about room for us to change places once he'd hopped up onto the edge of the cockpit—didn't even have to adjust the seat as we are exactly the same height. He gave me his flying helmet.

I couldn't bear it. I told him.

"I killed her. I shot her."

"*What?*"

"It was me. I shot Julie."

For a moment it seemed like there was nothing else that mattered or had any meaning in the whole world. All there was in the world was me in the pilot's seat of that Lysander and Jamie perched on the edge of the cockpit with his hand on the sliding canopy, no noise but the idle roar of the engine, no light anywhere but the three small runway flares and the moon glinting against the dials. Finally Jamie asked a brief question.

"Did you mean to?"

"Yes. She asked me to—I couldn't—*couldn't* let her down."

After another long Lysander moment, Jamie said abruptly, "Now don't start weeping, Kittyhawk! Court-martial or not, you have to fly the plane now, because I don't trust myself quite, not after that confession." He managed to unwedge himself from the edge of the cockpit and swung lightly from the wing strut to the access ladder at the back. I watched him climb into the rear cockpit and after a moment heard him introducing himself to my Jamaican friend.

FLY THE PLANE, MADDIE

I slid the canopy shut and began to run through the familiar preflight checks.

Then just as I started to put power on, this hand on my shoulder.

Just like that—nothing said. He just put his hand through the bulkhead, exactly as she'd done, and squeezed my shoulder. He has very strong fingers.

And he kept his hand there the whole way home, even when he was reading the map and giving me headings.

So I am not flying alone now after all.

I am running out of paper. This notebook of Etienne's is nearly full. I have an idea what to do with all of it, though.

With that in mind I don't think I'll put down the Machiavellian Intelligence Officer's name. Didn't Julie say he introduced himself with a number at her interview? He introduced himself as himself this afternoon. Awkward to write about it without using a name, though. John Balliol, perhaps, that's a good ironic name, the miserable Scottish king William Wallace lost his life defending. Sir John Balliol. I'm getting good at this. Perhaps I should join the Special Operations Executive after all.

Oh, Maddie-lass, NOT IN A MILLION YEARS.

My interview with Sir John Balliol had to be in the debriefing room—I suppose they do briefings there as well as debriefings, but that's what everybody calls it. It had to be there, didn't it, because it had to be done properly. Sergeant Silvey took me down. I know Silvey is soft on me, he always has been, and I think he is brokenhearted over Julie, but he was dead stiff and formal escorting me to my interview—awkward, you know? He didn't like to be doing it. He didn't like it that I was locked in, either. Argued about it with the squadron leader. Doesn't matter—it's all down to protocol in the end, and the bottom line is that I shouldn't have taken that plane to France in the first place.

So I got marched down to the debriefing room under guard, and as I walked in I was suddenly shamefully aware of what a ragamuffin I am *always*—like a Glaswegian evacuee!—still wearing the French photographer's wife's climbing trousers and Etienne Thibaut's threadbare jacket and Jamie's boots, the same clothes I've been wearing for the past week and a good deal of the past two months and, by the way, the same clothes that I was wearing when I blew the Ormaie city center to blazes. No feminine wiles to fall back on—I stepped into the whitewashed stone room with my heart going berserk against my ribs like a detonating engine. The room was exactly as it had been the first time he met me there nearly two years ago—two hard chairs pulled close to the electric heater, pot of tea under a cozy on the desk. It didn't smell like the interrogation room in Ormaie,

but it was impossible not to think of it.

"I'm afraid this may take some time," Balliol said apologetically, holding out his hand to me. "I trust you managed to get some sleep last night?"

He didn't have his specs on. That must be what caught me out—he just looked like anybody. Then the way he offered his hand to me. I was instantly in Ormaie again, in the cobbled street with the new key and the old plans in my pocket and my heart full of hatred and bloody-mindedness—and I shook his hand and answered through my teeth, "*Ja, mein Hauptsturmführer.*"

He looked quite startled and I am sure I went red as a tomato. OH MADDIE WHAT A WAY TO BEGIN.

"Sorry—sorry!" I gasped. "*Je suis désolée—*" *Unbelievable*, I am still trying to speak French to people.

"Not quite out of the trenches yet, are we?" he remarked softly. With light fingertips against my back he guided me to one of the chairs. "Tea, Silvey," he directed, and Sergeant Silvey quietly served up and let himself out.

Balliol's glasses were lying on the desk. He put them on and perched against the edge of the desk holding his teacup in its saucer, and his hands were so steady I had to put my own cup on the floor—couldn't have bone china rattling in my lap while he stood there pinning me down with those huge magnified eyes. Crikey—Julie quite fancied him. Can't imagine why. He scares me to *death*.

"What are you afraid of, Maddie?" he asked quietly. None of this "Flight Officer Beaufort-Stuart" nonsense.

I am not going to say it again. There is no one else I need say it to. This was the last time—

"I killed Julie. Verity, I mean. I shot her myself."

He put his own cup down on the desk with a clatter and stared at me. "*I beg your pardon?*"

"I'm afraid of being tried for murder."

I looked away from him, at the drain in the floor. This was the place where the German spy tried to strangle Eva Seiler. I shivered, actually shivered, when I realized that. I have never

seen such hideous bruises in my entire life, not before or since. Julie was tortured in this room.

When I looked back at Balliol he was still leaning against the desk, his shoulders slumped, spectacles pushed back on his head, pinching his nose between his fingers as though he had a migraine.

"I'm afraid of hanging," I added miserably.

"*Great Scott*, girl," he snapped, and jammed the specs back down over his eyes. "You'll have to tell me what happened. I confess you have—startled me, but as I'm not wearing my judge's wig at the moment, let's have it."

"They were transporting her in a bus full of prisoners to one of their concentration camps and we tried to stop it—"

He interrupted plaintively, "Must it be the murder first? Go back a bit." He peered at me with an anxious frown. "*Mea culpa*, forgive me. unfortunate choice of words. You didn't say it *was* murder, did you? Only, you're worried others might see it that way....Possibly a mistake, or an accident. Well, out with it, my child. Start from the beginning, when you landed in France."

I told him everything—well, almost everything. There is one thing I didn't tell him about, and that is this big stack of paper I have been humping around in my flight bag—everything Julie's written, everything I've written, all her scraps of hotel stationery and sheet music and my Pilot's Notes and Etienne's exercise book—I didn't tell him there's a written record.

I'm amazed at what a smooth liar I've become. Or, not a liar exactly—I didn't lie to him. The story I gave him isn't like a pullover full of holes, dropped stitches that will easily unravel when you start to poke at them. More like—slip one, knit one, pass slipped stitch over. Between Penn and Engel there was enough information that I didn't need to mention I'd got Julie's written confession up in my bedroom. Because I'm jolly well not turning it over to some filing clerk in London. It is *mine*.

And my own notes—well, I need them so I can make a proper report for the Accident Committee.

It *did* take a long time, the telling. Sergeant Silvey brought us another pot of tea and then another. At the end Balliol

assured me quietly, “You won’t hang.”

“But I’m responsible.”

“No more than I.” He looked away. “Tortured and sent off to be used as a lab specimen—dear God. That lovely, clever girl. I may as well—I am *wretched*. No, you’ll not hang.”

He drew a long, shaking breath. “‘Killed in action’ was what the first wire told us, and ‘killed in action’ the verdict shall remain,” he said firmly. “She *was* killed in action by this account, and given the number of people who died under fire that night I don’t think we need give out details of who shot whom. Your story shall not leave this building. You’ve not told anyone here what happened, have you?”

“I told her brother,” I said. “And anyway, you bug this room. People listen through the shutters to the kitchen. It’ll have to come out.”

He gazed at me thoughtfully, shaking his head.

“Is there anything about us you *don’t* know, Kittyhawk? We’ll keep your secrets and you keep ours. ‘Careless talk costs lives.’”

In France it really does. It’s not as funny as it sounds.

“Look, Maddie, let’s break for half an hour—I’m afraid there are a beastly lot of details I’m meant to grill you about, which we’ve not even touched on yet, and I feel I’ve rather lost my composure.”

He pulled out a dotted silk handkerchief, turned aside again, and wiped his nose. When he faced me once more he gave me a hand to raise me to my feet. “Also, I think you need a nap.”

What did Julie say about me—I am trained to react positively to orders from people in authority. I went back to my room and fell soundly asleep for twenty minutes, and dreamed Julie was teaching me to foxtrot in the kitchen at Craig Castle. Of course she did teach me to foxtrot, though it was at one of the Maidsend hops and not in the kitchen at Craig Castle, but the dream was *so real* that when I woke up I couldn’t at first figure out where I was. And then it was like being kicked in the head with desolation all over again.

Except now instead of “The Last Time I Saw Paris” I have

got “Dream a Little Dream of Me” stuck playing in my mind over and over, which is what the band was playing when we were dancing at Maidsend. I don’t mind at all, as I am *so sick* of “The Last Time I Saw Paris.” If I ever hear either tune being played in some public place I am sure I will immediately start to howl.

So then Balliol and I had another session and it got a bit more technical, me having to remember names and numbers I didn’t know I knew—code names for every single Resistance agent I’d been introduced to, Balliol tallying them against notes in a little calfskin notebook of his own, and the location of any arms or supplies or *cachettes* I knew about. There was a moment where I was bent over with my elbows on my knees, and I was pulling at my hair until the roots hurt, trying to come up with accurate map coordinates for the Thibauts’ barn and the rose woman’s garage. It dawned on me I’d been sitting there tearing my hair like that for the past twenty minutes, and suddenly I got mad.

I raised my head with a jerk and asked furiously, “*Why?* Why do you *care* whether I can come up with the coordinates out of my head? I can *make up coordinates* the way Julie made up code! Give me a map and I’ll point it out, you don’t *need* me to do this! What do you *really* want, you bloody Machiavellian BASTARD?”

He was silent for a minute.

“I’ve been asked to test you a bit,” he confessed at last. “Turn up the heat, see how you respond. I’m not honestly sure what to do with you. The Air Ministry wants to take away your license and the Special Operations Executive wants to recommend you for a George Medal. They’d like you to stay with them.”

NOT IN A MILLION YEARS.

But, but. My success as an unofficial agent for the SOE will cancel out my flight to France as an unofficial pilot for the RAF. I won’t get a medal, and I jolly well don’t want or deserve one, but I won’t lose my license, either—I mean, you could say I’ve already lost it myself, but they’ll reissue it. They won’t take it away. They won’t even take away my job. *Oh*—now this really is good reason to blub, tears of relief. They will let me fly again.

I will have to go up before the Accident Committee, but that will just be about the actual accident—as if I were one of the Moon Squadron itself, pranging my own plane. I won't be charged with anything else.

And the Air Transport Auxiliary will be ferrying planes to France, come the invasion. Not long now—spring. I will go back. I know I will go back.

I am exhausted. Except my nap and for a couple of hours after we landed I haven't slept since Sunday night, and it's Tuesday evening now. One more thing, though, before bed—

Balliol has given me a copy of a message they have just received and decoded from the Damask W/T operator.

**REPORT HEAVY ALLIED BOMBARDMENT OVERHEAD
ORMAIE NIGHT OF SAT 11 DEC AM SUN 12 DEC
SUCCESSFUL OP DESTROYING CDB AKA GESTAPO
REGIONAL HQ NO KNOWN ARRESTS ALL WELL SVP
PASS MSG TO KITTYHAWK SAY ISOLDES FATHER
IS FOUND SHOT THROUGH HEAD BELIEVED
SUICIDE**

"Who is Isolde's father?" Balliol asked when he gave it to me.

"The Gestapo officer who—who questioned Verity. And sentenced her."

"Suicide," Balliol said softly. "Another wretched man."

"Another wretched girl," I corrected.

Those ripples in the pond again—it just doesn't stop in one place. All those lives that have touched mine so briefly—most of them I don't even know their real names, like Julie's great-aunt and the driver of the Rosalie. And some of them I don't know anything other than their names, like Benjamin zylberberg, the Jewish doctor, and Esther Lévi, whose flute music Julie was given to write on. And some of them I met briefly and liked and won't ever see again, like the vicar's son who flew Spitfires and Anna Engel and the Jamaican gunner.

And then there is Isolde von Linden, at school in Switzerland, who doesn't know yet that her father has just shot himself.

Isolde still in the realm of the sun, in the shimmering daylight still, Isolde—

I have kept the matchbook that her father gave Amélie.

I've had a bath and borrowed a pair of pajamas from the pretty First Aid Nursing Yeomanry driver who never says anything. Goodness knows what she thinks of me. I am not locked in or guarded anymore. Someone is going to fly me back to Manchester tomorrow. Tonight—tonight I will sleep in this room one more time, in this bed where Julie cried herself to sleep in my arms eight months ago.

I'm going to keep her gray silk scarf. But I want Jamie to take this notebook, and my pilot's notes, and Julie's confession, and give them all to Esmé Beaufort-Stuart, because it is only right that Julie's lady mother should be told. If she wants to know, I think it is her right to know. Absolutely *Every Last Detail*.

I am back in England. I can go back to work. I haven't got the words to say how stunned and grateful I am that I have been allowed to keep my license.

But a part of me lies buried in lace and roses on a riverbank in France—a part of me is broken off forever. A part of me will always be unflyable, stuck in the climb.

Lady Beaufort-Stuart
Craig Castle
Castle Craig
Aberdeenshire

26 Dec. 1943

My darling Maddie,

Jamie has delivered your “letters”—both yours and Julie’s, and I have read them. They will stay here, and be safe—the Official Secrets Act is of little consequence in a house that absorbs secrets like damp. A few more recipe cards and prescription forms tossed in amongst the teeming contents of our two libraries will surely go unnoticed.

I want to tell you what Jamie said to me as he gave me these pages:

“Maddie did the right thing.”

I say so too.

Please come to see me, Maddie darling, as soon as they let you. The wee lads are all distraught with the news and you will do them good. Perhaps they will do you good, as well. They are my only consolation at the moment, and I have been fearfully busy trying to make it a “happy” Christmas for them. Ross and Jock have now lost both parents in the bombing, so perhaps I shall keep them when the war is over.

I should like to “keep” you, too, if you will let me—I mean, in my heart and as my only daughter’s best friend. It would be like losing two daughters if you were to leave us now.

Please come back soon. The window is always open.

Fly safely.

Yr. loving,
Esmé

P.S. Thank you for the Eterpen. It is most extraordinary—not a single word of this letter has blotted. No one will ever know how many tears I shed whilst writing it!

I do mean fly safely. And I do mean come back.

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Author's Debriefing

As someone has already said, “My reports are so rubbish.” I am legally bound to write this afterword, as I am legally bound to ensure that this book is not in breach of the Official Secrets Acts. This is meant to be a historical note, and it *pains* me to admit that *Code Name Verity* is fiction—that Julia Beaufort-Stuart and Maddie Brodatt are not actually real people, merely products of my adventure-obsessed brain.

But I’ll try. This book started off rather simply as a portrait of an Air Transport Auxiliary pilot. Being a woman and a pilot myself, I wanted to explore the possibilities that would have been open to me during the Second World War. I’d already written a war story about a girl pilot (“Something Worth Doing” in *Firebirds Soaring*, edited by Sharyn November), but I wanted to write something longer and more accurately detailed and, above all, more plausible.

I started with research, hoping to get plot ideas, and read *The Forgotten Pilots* by Lettice Curtis. This is the definitive history of the Air Transport Auxiliary, and it’s written by a woman, so it felt right and natural for my ATA pilot to be a girl. But the ATA story careened out of control when (by accident, while making dinner) I stumbled on the framework for *Code Name Verity* and added in a Special Operations Executive agent.

More reading ensued—okay, I could have a pilot AND a spy, and they’d both be girls. And it would still be plausible. Because there *were* women doing these jobs. There weren’t many of them. But they were real. They worked and suffered and fought just as hard as any man. Many of them died.

Bear in mind that despite my somewhat exhaustive quest for historical accuracy, this book is not meant to be a good history but rather *a good story*. So there is one major leap of fictional faith the reader has to grant me, and that is Maddie’s flight to France. Women ATA pilots were not allowed to fly to Europe until well after the invasion of Normandy, when German-occupied territory was safely back in Allied hands. (When Maddie is called the “only shot-down Allied air-woman

outside Russia,” it is a reference to Russian women who were actually combat pilots during the war.) I worked very hard to construct a believable chain of events leading up to Maddie’s Lysander trip to France—her trump card is really my trump card, the fact that she can authorize her own flight.

The other thing I did make up (like a certain unreliable narrator) is all the proper nouns. Most of them, anyway. My reasoning is that it is an easy way to avoid historical incongruities. For example, Oakway is a very thinly disguised Ringway (now Manchester Airport); but unlike Oakway, Ringway had no squadron on site in the winter of 1940. Maidsend is a composite of many Kentish airfields. The French city of Ormaie doesn’t exist, but it’s loosely based on Poitiers.

Early in my research I also planned to say here that I’d made up the specific jobs of SOE interrogator and SOE taxi pilot. But it turns out that there was an American ATA pilot, Betty Lussier, who more or less did both jobs herself at separate times during the war (though she worked for the OSS, the Americans, not the SOE). Every time I find out the life story of another woman who was a wartime pilot or Resistance agent, I think, *You couldn’t make these people up*.

I would love to go through my book page by page and document where Absolutely Every Last Detail comes from—how I found out that you can use kerosene to thin ink, or that school nurses used pen nibs to do blood tests, or where I first discovered a Jewish prescription form. Obviously I *can’t* do it for Absolutely Every Last Detail, but since paper and ink are the fabric of this novel, let’s talk about the BALLPOINT PEN! It was going to be very difficult to keep all my fictional writers supplied in ink, and it would be convenient to give them ballpoints. So I thought I ought to check to make sure ballpoint pens existed in 1943.

It turns out they did, but only just. The ballpoint pen was invented by László Bíró, a Hungarian journalist who fled to Argentina to escape the German occupation of Europe. In 1943 he licensed his invention to the RAF, and the first ballpoint pens were manufactured in Reading, England, by the Miles aircraft manufacturer, to supply pilots with a lasting ink supply! I had to use a sample pen in *Code Name Verity*—ballpoints weren’t on

the market yet. But it was *plausible*. That's all I ask—that my details be plausible. And I *love* that the ballpoint pen was first manufactured for the RAF. Who knew?

There's a real story, like this one, behind just about every detail or episode in the book. I think it was in one of Terry Deary's *Horrible History* books that I learned about the SOE agent who was caught looking the wrong way before crossing a French street. I myself nearly got killed once making the same mistake. I've also spent a couple of backbreaking afternoons clearing rocks from a runway. Even the breakdowns of the Lysander and the Citroën Rosalie are based in reality. The Green Man is a real pub, if you can find it. I didn't even make up the name of that one. But it's called something else now.

I know there must be mistakes and inaccuracies sprinkled throughout the book, but for these I beg a little poetic licence. Some of them are conscious, some are not. The code name "Verity" of the title is the most obvious to me. As far as I know, female SOE agents in France all had French girl's names as code names, and Verity is an English name. But it translates well as *vérité*—the French word for *truth*—and some of the code names for wireless operators are so random ("nurse," for example), that I've decided to stick with it. Another good example is the use of the term *Nacht und Nebel*, which refers to the Nazi policy of making certain political prisoners vanish as though into "night and fog." The term was so secret that it's highly unlikely Julie would have ever heard it. However, prisoners at the Ravensbrück concentration camp knew they were designated "NN," and by the end of 1944 they knew what it meant, too. Nelson's last words, also, are a subject of some considerable debate. But whatever he actually *said*, Hardy *did* kiss him. Where I fail in accuracy, I hope I make up for it in plausibility.

There are many people who helped to make this book complete and perfect, and they all deserve tremendous thanks. Among the unsung heroes are an enlisted trio of "cultural" and language advisers, Scottish, French, and German: Iona O'Connor, Marie-Christine Graham, and Katja Kasri, who threw themselves into their requested jobs with the enthusiasm of wartime volunteers. My husband, Tim Gatland, was my technical and flight adviser (as always); and Terry Charman of

the Imperial War Museum of London vetted the manuscript for historical accuracy. Jonathan Habicht of The Shuttleworth Collection allowed me to get up close and personal with a Lysander and an Anson. Tori Tyrrell and Miriam Roberts were indispensable first readers, and Tori actually suggested the section titles, which, obvious though they are, eluded me at first. My daughter, Sara, suggested some of the more harrowing plot twists. The book would not exist if not for the lovely Sharyn November, Senior Editor at Viking Children's Books, who originally asked me to write it; and under the orchestration of my agent, Ginger Clark, the editorial teams led by Stella Paskins at Egmont uK, Catherine Onder at Disney•Hyperion Books, and Amy Black at Double-day Canada coaxed *Code Name Verity* into its finished form.

I also feel that I should discreetly thank a score of unnamed people whose lives are woven into mine and who have influenced me over the years: friends, family, teachers and colleagues—German, French, Polish, American, Japanese, Scottish, English—Jew and Christian—who during the global conflict of the Second World War were variously Resistance fighters, camouflage unit artists, RAF fighter pilots and uSAF transport pilots, child evacuees, prisoners in American as well as German concentration camps, refugees in hiding, Hitler Youths, WAACs, soldiers and prisoners of war. LEST WE FORGET.

ELIZABETH WEIN was born in New York City, grew up abroad, and currently lives in Scotland with her husband and two children. She is an avid flyer of small planes and holds a PhD in folklore from the University of Pennsylvania. Elizabeth is the author of *Code Name Verity*, winner of the Edgar Award in the Best Young Adult category and a Printz Honor Book; *Rose Under Fire*, winner of the Schneider Family Book Award; and *Black Dove, White Raven*, winner of the Children's Africana Book Award. Visit her online at www.elizabethwein.com.

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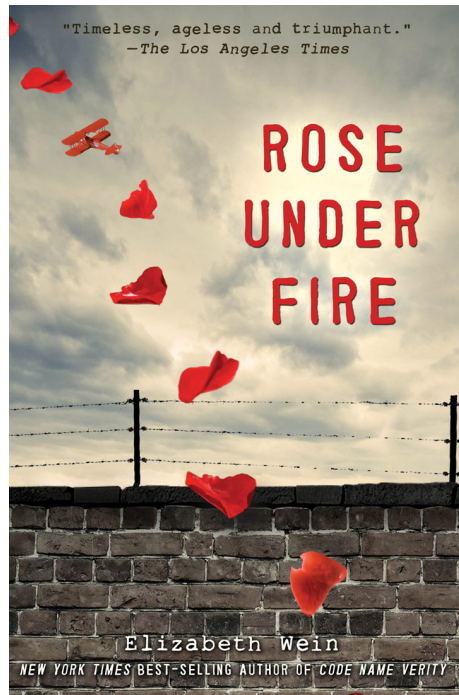
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Part 1

SOUTHAMPTON

Rose Moyer Justice
August 2, 1944
Hamble, Hampshire

NOTES FOR AN ACCIDENT REPORT

I just got back from Celia Forester's funeral. I'm supposed to be writing up an official report for the Tempest she flew into the ground, since she's obviously not going to write it herself, and I saw it happen. And also because I feel responsible. I know it wasn't my fault—I really do know that now. But I briefed her. We both had Tempests to deliver, and I'd flown one a couple of times before. Celia hadn't. She took off ten minutes after me. If she'd taken off first, we might both still be alive.

I've never had to do a report like this, and I don't really know where to begin. Maddie gave me this beautiful leather-bound notebook to draft it in; she thinks it helps to have nice paper, and knew I wouldn't buy any for myself, since like everything else it's so scarce. She says you need to bribe yourself because it's always *blah* writing up accident reports. She had to write a big report herself last January and also be grilled in person by the Accident Committee. She's right about nice paper, of course, and I have filled up a couple of those pretty cloth-bound diaries that lock; but all I ever put in them is attempts at poetry. Too bad I can't put the accident report into verse.

There were a few other Air Transport Auxiliary pilots at

Celia's funeral, but Maddie was the only ATA girl besides me. Felicyta couldn't come; she had a delivery chit this morning. Along with Celia and Felicyta, Maddie and I were the ones who gave out Mrs. Hatch's strawberries to the soldiers lining up to board the landing craft for the D-Day invasion. It made us into friends. Felicyta was very tearful this morning, banging things around angrily. Probably she shouldn't be flying. I know exactly what Daddy would say—three thousand miles away on Justice Field in Pennsylvania—if it was me: "Rosie, go home, you shouldn't fly while your friends are being buried." But the planes have got to be delivered. *There's a war on.*

Boy, am I sick of hearing that.

It never stops. There are planes to deliver every day straight from the factory or just overhauled, painted in fresh camouflage or invasion stripes, ready to go to France. I got thrown in at the deep end when I stepped off the ship from New York three months ago, and before the end of May I was delivering Spitfires, real fighter planes, from Southampton's factories near the Hamble Aerodrome to just about every airbase in southern England. I was supposed to get some training, but they just put me through a few flight tests instead. Being the daughter of someone who runs a flight school has paid off in spades—I've been flying since I was twelve, which means I've been flying longer than some of the older pilots, even though I'm only eighteen. The baby on the team.

There was a lull for a week after D-Day, when the invasion started. Actually, I don't think it should be called an "invasion" when really we are trying to get most of Europe back from the Germans, who invaded it in the first place. Our Allied soldiers left for France in the beginning of June, and for one week only military flights got authorized, so there was no flying for us—the Air Transport Auxiliary in Britain are civilian pilots, like the WASPs at home. That was a quiet week, the second week of June. Then the flying bombs started coming in.

Holy cow, I can't say how much I hate the flying bombs.

V-1 is what the Germans call them. V stands for *Vergeltungswaffe*, retaliation weapon. I worked hard at memorizing the real word for it, because I always think it means *vengeance*: Vengeance Weapon No. 1. The only thing

these bombs are meant to do is terrify people. Everyone puts on a brave face, though—the English are very good at putting on a brave face, I'll give them that! People try to make the bombs less scary by giving them stupid names: *doodlebugs*—sounds like baby talk. *Buzz bombs*—a phrase for older kids to use. The other ferry pilots call them *pilotless planes*, which should seem simple and technical, but it gives me the creeps. An aircraft flying blind, no cockpit, no windows, no way of landing except to self-destruct? How can you win an air war against a plane that doesn't need a pilot? A plane that turns into a bomb? Our planes, the British and American aircraft I fly every day in the ATA, don't even have radios, much less guns. We don't stand a chance. Celia Forester didn't stand a chance.

At the funeral, the local minister—vicar, they say here—had never even met Celia. He called her “a dedicated pilot.”

It doesn't mean *anything*. We're *all* dedicated. But to tell the truth, I don't think any of us would have had anything better to say. Celia was so quiet. She was only just posted to Hamble in May, about the same time I was, and for the same reason—to ferry planes for the invasion. She hardly ever talked to *anybody*. I can't blame her—she had a fiancé who was in Bomb Disposal and was killed at Christmas. It's bad enough being a newcomer without being stuck grieving for your boyfriend. Celia wasn't very happy here.

Am I happy here?

I guess I am. I *like* what I'm doing. I wanted to come *so badly*—I can't believe they gave me that diploma in December, like Laura Ingalls Wilder leaving school at fifteen so she could be a teacher! And now here I am, in England for the first time, not far from where Daddy was born, and I'm actually *helping*. I'm *useful*. Even without Uncle Roger being so high up in the Royal Engineers, cutting through the red tape for me, I'd have found a way to get here. And I'm a lot luckier than Celia in other ways, not just because I'm still alive—I'm lucky to have met Nick almost as soon as I got here, and lucky to have had so much flying experience before I started.

I've read over that last paragraph and it sounds so chirpy and stuck-up and—just so dumb. But the truth is I have to keep reminding myself again and again that I want to do this,

because I'm *so tired* now. None of us ever get enough sleep. Not just because we're working so hard; it's those horrible flying bombs, too.

The tiredness is beginning to show. We're all cracking at the seams, I think. Maddie and I ended up being taken out to lunch by Celia's parents after the funeral, because Maddie was still sitting in our pew sobbing quietly into her handkerchief after everyone else had left, and I was sitting with her and sniffing a bit, too. I am sure the Foresters were touched to find anyone showing so much raw emotion at their daughter's short, bleak funeral, when everyone else there hardly knew her.

But neither one of us had actually been crying for Celia. On the train back to Southampton, Maddie confessed to me, "My best friend was killed in action, in 'enemy action,' like it always says in the obituaries, exactly nine months ago. She didn't get a funeral."

"My gosh," I said. I can't really imagine what it must feel like to have your best friend killed by a bomb or gunfire. So I added, "Well, it was brave of you to come along today!"

Maddie said, "I felt like a *rat* eating lunch with the Foresters. So cheap and ugly. Them paying for the meal and me trying to think of *anything* to say about Celia apart from 'She was a nice girl but she never talked to anybody.'"

"I know. I felt that way too. Look, we're both rats, Maddie—I was being more selfish than you. I couldn't think about anything all day except having to write the darn accident report. Celia had never been up in a Tempest before, and we only had one set of pilot's notes between us, and she refused to take them with her. I should have *forced* her to take them. And I bet now they won't let any other girls *near* a Tempest till the accident's been investigated, and if we don't get to fly 'em, again it'll be MY FAULT as much as Celia's."

"They'll let us fly 'em," Maddie said mournfully. "Desperate times, and all that."

She's probably right. The fighter pilots need every Tempest they can get. They're the best plane we've got for shooting down a flying bomb.

When Maddie and I got back to the aerodrome at Hamble,

Felicyta was waiting for us. She was sitting in a corner of the Operations Room and had made a little funeral feast. She had a plate of toast cut up in one-inch squares with a bit of margarine and the tiniest blob of strawberry jam on each square—simple but pretty.

“We make do with not much, as usual,” Felicyta said, and tried to smile. “Here are teacups. Was it terrible?”

I nodded. Maddie grimaced.

“Celia’s mother says we should share the things from her locker,” I said. “Mrs. Forester doesn’t want any of it back.”

Now we all grimaced.

“Someone’s got to do it,” I said. Maddie began pouring tea, and Felicyta touched me lightly on the shoulder, like she wanted to support me but was a little embarrassed to show it. She gave an odd, tight smile and said, “I will take care of Celia’s locker. You must report this accident, Rosie?”

“Yes, I’m writing the accident report. Lucky me.”

“These papers are for you.” Felicyta patted a cardboard file folder on the table’s worn oilcloth. “It is a letter from the mechanic who examined Celia’s plane after her crash. He gave it to me when I flew there this morning. You need to read this before you write the report.”

“Is it secret?” I had to ask because so many things *are* confidential.

“No, it is not secret, but—” Felicyta took a deep breath. “You saw Celia crash. You said you thought the ailerons on her wings did not work. This letter tells why. Celia hit a flying bomb.”

Now that I’m sitting here with this notebook, I don’t know if I *should* tell the Accident Committee what the mechanic said, because it is *exactly* the kind of thing they’ll use as an excuse to stop girls from flying Tempests—though I bet any guy would do the same thing, given the chance.

Felicyta wasn’t kidding. The mechanic thinks Celia ran into a V-1 flying bomb. No, not “ran into” it—not accidentally. He thinks she did it on purpose. He thinks she tried to tip a flying bomb out of the sky.

Oh—it is crazy.

When Felicyta told me, over the sad little squares of memorial toast, it made me angry. ATA deaths are never that heroic. An ATA pilot is killed *every* week flying faulty planes, flying in bad weather, coming down on cracked-up runways—there was that terrible accident where the plane skidded and flipped after landing because of the mud, and by the time people got out to the poor pilot, he'd *drowned*—stuck upside down in a cockpit full of standing water. HORRIBLE. But not heroic. I've never heard of an ATA pilot getting hit by enemy fire. We don't dogfight. Our bomb bays are empty; our gun sights aren't connected to anything. Our deaths don't ever earn us posthumous medals. Drowning in mud, lost at sea, engine failure after takeoff.

So I didn't believe Felicyta at first—she was so convinced by the mechanic's letter, but it felt like she was trying to make Celia's death into a hero's death, when it was just another faulty aircraft.

"Anti-aircraft guns on the ground are good for shooting down flying bombs," Felicyta said. "But you know the Royal Air Force Tempest squadron takes down as many flying bombs in the air as the gunners do on the ground, and Celia was in a Tempest—"

"She didn't have any guns," I said. "She wasn't armed." Jeez Louise, she didn't even have a *radio*. She couldn't even tell the radio room what was wrong as she was coming in to land.

"You do not need guns," Felicyta insisted passionately, her eyes blazing. "The mechanic says if you fly fast enough you can ram a pilotless plane with your wingtip."

We leaned our heads in together over the tiny decorated squares of toast, talking in low tones like conspirators.

"I've heard the lads talk about that," Maddie said. "Doodlebug tipping."

"In Polish we call it *taran*—aerial ramming. A Polish pilot rammed a German plane over Warsaw on the first day of the war! The Soviet pilots do it too—same word in Russian. *Taran*. It is the best way to stop a pilotless plane in the air," Felicyta said. "Before it reaches a target, when it is still over sea or open

country, not over London or Southampton. That is what the Royal Air Force does with their Tempests.”

“But they’re *armed!*” I insisted.

“You do not need to be armed for *taran*,” Felicyta said. “You do not need guns to ram another aircraft.”

“She’s right,” Maddie said. “When our lads come up behind a flying bomb and fire at it, they have to fly into the explosion. Absolutely no fun. But if you tip the bomb with your wing before it’s over London, it just dives into a field and there’s no mess.”

I just couldn’t believe Celia would try such a trick, her first time in a Tempest. But, as we all kept saying, we didn’t really know her.

“Would you do it, Maddie?” I asked.

She shook her head slowly. It was more of an *I don’t know* than a *no*. Maddie’s a very careful pilot and probably has more hours than the rest of us put together. She is the only one of us who is a First Officer. But I realized, just then, that I didn’t really know her, either.

“Felicyta would do it,” Maddie said, avoiding an answer. “Wouldn’t you, Fliss? You see a flying bomb in the sky ahead of you, and you’re flying a Tempest. Would you make a hundred-and-eighty-degree turn and run the other way? Or try to tip it out of the sky?”

“You know what I would do,” Felicyta said, her eyes narrowed. “Don’t you believe a woman could make a *taran* as well as a man? You know what I would do, Maddie Brodatt. But I have never met a flying bomb in the air. Have you?”

“Yes,” Maddie said quietly.

We stared at her with wide eyes. I am sure my mouth hung open.

“It was back in June,” she said. “The week after the flying bombs started. I was delivering a Spitfire and I saw it coming toward me, only a couple of hundred feet below me. I thought it was another plane. It *looked* like another plane. But when I waggled my wings it just stayed on course, and then it passed below me—terribly close—and I realized it was a doodlebug. They aren’t very big. Horrible things, eyeless, just a bomb with

wings.”

Pilotless, I thought. Ugh. “Weren’t you scared?”

“Not really—you know how you don’t worry about a near miss until later, when you think about it afterward? It was before I’d heard about anybody tipping a doodlebug, and anyway I hadn’t a hope of catching it. By the time I’d realized what it was, it was just a speck in the distance, still heading for London. I didn’t see it fall.”

I haven’t seen one fall, either, but I’ve heard them. You can hear them THIRTY MILES away, rattling along. Southampton doesn’t get fired on as relentlessly as London and Kent, but we get the miserable things often enough that the noise terrifies me. Like being in the next field over from a big John Deere corn picker: *clackety clackety clackety*. Then the timer counts down, the engine stops, and for a few seconds you don’t hear anything as the bomb falls. And then you hear the explosion.

I hate to admit this, but I am so scared of the flying bombs that if I’d known about them ahead of time I would not have come. Even after Uncle Roger’s behind-the-scenes scrambling to get the paperwork done for me.

The mechanic says in his letter that he thinks Celia damaged her wing in a separate incident—separate from the crash, “possibly the result of a deliberate brush with another aircraft.” He didn’t actually mention flying bombs. But you could tell the idea was in his head.

Now I am upset all over again, remembering the crash. It took me by surprise, watching—I knew something was wrong, of course, but I never expected her to lose control like that, that close to the ground. It happened so suddenly. I’d been waiting for her so we could come back to Hamble together.

I want to talk to Nick about it. He left a message for me—sweet of him, worrying about me having to go to Celia’s funeral. It’s after ten now, but it’s still light out. They have two hours of daylight saving in the summer here—they call it Double Summer Time. So I’ll walk down to the phone box in the village and hope Nick’s not away on some mission. And that I don’t get told off by his landlady for calling so late.

Horrible war. So much more horrible here than back in the

States. Every few weeks someone's mother or brother or another friend is killed. And already I am fed up with the shortages, never any butter and never enough sleep. The combination of working so hard, and the constant fear, and just the general *blahness* of everything—I wasn't prepared for it. But how could I possibly, possibly have been prepared for it? They've been living with it for five years. All the time I've been swimming at Conestoga Grove Lake, playing girls' varsity basketball, building a tree house for Karl and Kurt like a good big sister, crop dusting with Daddy, and helping Mother make applesauce, Maddie's been delivering fighter planes. When her best friend was killed by a bomb, or whatever it was, nine months ago, I was probably sitting in Mr. Wagner's creative writing class working out rhyme schemes.

It's so strange to be here at last, and so different from what I expected.

I have put my accident report into verse after all. (I think I am trying to *trick* myself into writing this darn thing.) I wish I'd written this poem earlier. It would have been nice to read it at Celia's service. I will send a copy to her parents.

FOR CELIA FORESTER (by Rose Justice)

The storm will swallow
the brave girl there
who fights destruction
with wings and air—

life and chaos
hover in flight
wingtip to wingtip
until the slight
triumphant moment
when their wings caress
and her crippled Tempest
flies pilotless.

Now that I am an ATA pilot at last, I wish I were a fighter pilot.

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August 5, 1944

Hamble, Southampton

And that's the first thing I said to Nick when I got him on the phone. I did get him at last. He wasn't at home, so I rang the airfield, and they said he was on his way but hadn't got there yet, AND he was "busy" tonight, so he might not be able to call back. I was so desperate I waited in the phone box for three quarters of an hour till he got in, and we talked for exactly as long as my cigarette tin of pennies held out. In three weeks he will be off to France, and I will not.

"Hello, Rose darling."

"I want to fly Tempests," I said through clenched teeth. "I want to be operational. I want to be in the Royal Air Force, blasting flying bombs to smithereens."

There was a good penny's worth of silence down the wire before Nick answered. Maybe that's where the saying comes from, *penny for your thoughts*. Speak up or the operator will cut you off.

Finally Nick said sympathetically, "What's made you so bloodthirsty?"

"I'm not bloodthirsty. There's no blood in a pilotless plane, is there! I'm a good pilot. I've probably been flying five years longer than half the boys in 150 Wing. I flew with Daddy from coast to coast across America when I was fifteen, and I did *all* the navigation. *You've* never flown a Tempest, or a Mustang, or a Mark Fourteen Spitfire—I've flown them *all*, dozens of times. They're wasting me just because I'm a girl! They won't even let us fly to France—they're prepping men for supply and taxi to the front lines, guys with hundreds fewer hours than me, but they're just passing over the women pilots. *It isn't fair.*"

I stopped to breathe. Nick said evenly, "See me, worrying you'd be upset by your friend's funeral. Instead you're after shooting down doodlebugs. What's going on, Rose?"

"How do you topple a doodlebug?" I asked. "The girls say you can do it with your wingtip."

Nick *laughed*. Then he paused. I didn't say anything because

I knew he was thinking. “You couldn’t,” he said at last. “Yes, I’ve heard that too, but you need to be flying something fast, not a taxi Anson or a Spitfire with only enough fuel to get you to the maintenance airfield. An ATA pilot couldn’t topple a V-1 flying bomb.”

“Celia did. She tried to, anyway. We think that’s why she crashed. How do they do it? Do you just bash it with your wingtip? The Polish pilots have a word for it. *Taran*. Aerial ramming.”

Another longish pause. I had stuffed in the entire contents of the cigarette tin right away—after feeding thirty of those gigantic pennies into the telephone it felt like I’d just thrown away a pirate’s treasure hoard. At any rate it added up to more than ten minutes. I didn’t want to be cut off.

And, of course, the operator was probably listening in. Nick’s job is very secret. I didn’t want to get him into trouble.

“No,” he said at last. “No, for God’s sake, don’t try that, Rose, you’ll kill yourself. Is that what Celia did? Good God Almighty. The idea is not to touch them at all. The doodlebug’s a bloody brilliant bomb, but it’s not a brilliant aircraft. It’s unstable, and if you get your wingtip just beneath the bomb’s wing, half a foot or so away from it, you can upset the airflow around its wing and make it stall. But you have to fly fast enough to keep up with it, and it’ll still go off when it hits the ground. *Promise* me you won’t try?”

My turn to be silent. Because I couldn’t make that promise. I guess I’ll never get the chance anyway, but if I did—well, I’m a better pilot than Celia was.

“Rose, darling?” Nick had to prompt me. “I’m not a fighter pilot either. They also serve who only stand and wait.”

Show-off, quoting Milton. He knows I like poetry.

“That’s garbage, Nick, and you know it,” I said hotly. “You’re not standing and waiting. You’re dropping off—” I choked back what I was going to say, thinking of the operator listening in. I’m not supposed to know what he’s doing, and I *don’t* know much about it, but Maddie’s boyfriend is in the same squadron—that’s how I met Nick—and you figure a little bit out after a while. They’ve been flying spies and saboteurs and

plastic explosive and machine guns in and out of France for the past two years—secret supplies for the D-Day invasion.

“You’re on the front line,” I insisted.

There was this long, guilty silence at the other end.

“Oh, you *really are* at the front,” I guessed angrily. “What? They’re going to transfer you, aren’t they, now that the front’s moved back? Or are they getting the Royal Air Force Special Duties squadron to do ferry work so they can weasel out of sending civilian ATA pilots into Europe?”

“They’re moving the squadron,” Nick gave me, cautiously.

I didn’t ask where. He wouldn’t have told me anyway.

“Far?”

“Yes.”

“Oh.”

That means out of the United Kingdom. Maybe the Mediterranean.

“Well—” Nick hesitated. “We’ve got three days’ leave before we go. It’s not much time, but it matches up with your next two days off. We could get married.”

I am sorry to say that I rained on his parade by laughing at him.

I mean, it is just so stupid. He is sweet and funny and kind and brave, and we talk so easily when we are together, and he is so proud to have a pilot for a girlfriend—“Looks like Katharine Hepburn and flies like Amelia Earhart” is how he introduced me to his parents (an exaggeration in both cases, but oh how I burned with joy and embarrassment when he said it!). But we still haven’t ever even been on a real date, dancing or to a film or anything like that—it’s always lunch in a pub or a quick cup of tea in the coffee shop at the train station just outside Portsmouth, which is halfway for both of us. It is so *hard* to get time together. Apparently, Maddie has supper with her boyfriend, Jamie, at his air base something like once every two months. And the last time Nick and I had the same day off, I had to stand him up because Uncle Roger and Aunt Edie were taking me out. Of course it never occurred to me to stand up Uncle Roger—but I am in *debt* to Uncle Roger, I mean morally,

for pulling the strings that got me here. Nick doesn't get that. I know he was hurt.

And now I hurt him again by laughing at his proposal. I tried to make it up to him and promised we would have a whole day, a real day to remember, all to ourselves before he went away.

It makes me angry. Why should it have to be like this, for all of us, all our generation? That the only way for a young couple to be together is to get married? No chance of a honeymoon, no flowers or champagne because the gardens are all full of cabbages and turnips and France is a war zone? No pretty silk dress unless someone manages to steal a parachute for you? No. I know I wouldn't get married suddenly even if it weren't wartime. I'd never do it without Daddy there to walk me down the aisle—with nothing more than a telegram to let him know!

It is the same for every young couple. We are all panicking that one of us will be killed next month, next week, tomorrow. All of us panicking that if we don't do it now, we'll never get a chance. Well, I don't care. I'm not letting the war take over my life.

Maddie laughed, too, when I told her about Nick's proposal.

"I know where he got *that* idea," she said. "Jamie and I are getting married on the twelfth of August. Next week!" She gave another hoot of laughter. "That is Nick all over. He's like a puppy. You said no, didn't you, Rosie? The poor lad! Tell you what—you can give him a good excuse and say you've a previous engagement. Come be my bridesmaid."

"What, *me*? Really?"

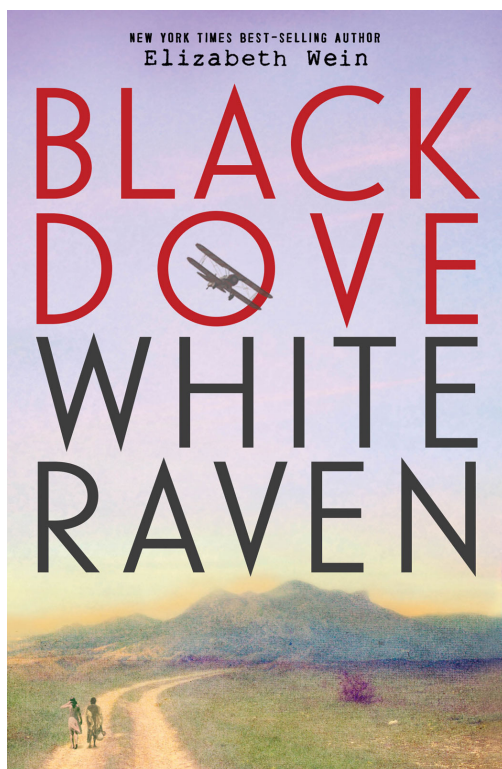
I was surprised and very pleased, but what a thoughtless thing to say. Her dead friend wasn't going to do it, was she? And all it did was remind her.

Anyway, of course I will.

I asked her if she knew where Nick and Jamie were going to go, and she gave me a funny look.

"Careless talk costs lives," she said.

Keep reading for a sneak peek of *Black Dove, White Raven*!



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Theme for Miss Shore by Emilia Menotti

Subject: "My Earliest Memory"

Beehive Hill Cooperative Coffee Farm

Tazma Meda, Wollo Province

19 October 1934 (Teqemt 9, 1927)

YOU DON'T HAVE MUCH CHOICE about what your parents make you do until you're big enough that they can't tie you down. I am not sure this is my earliest memory, but it is the oldest one with details in it. It is of being tied into the open cockpit of a Curtiss Jenny flying machine by Cordelia Dupré. When I was little, Delia took up more space in my head and heart than my own father did. In fact, she still takes up more space there. Delia is the most important thing that ever happened to our momma.

I know that this memory takes place when I was five years old because I was five years old when Momma and Delia bought the Jenny, their own airplane. It was a biplane that looked a lot like the one we have now, one wing above the other, with open cockpits. Well, there were four of us to fit into the Jenny's two cockpits, counting me and Teo. Teo and I weren't very big when we were five, but Momma and Delia figured out ways of taking us along.

This memory is not of my first flight. My first *flight* was in France in 1919, when I was five *weeks* old, not five years. My father, Papà Menotti, did the flying. Momma carried me against her belly in a scarf tied around her waist and under her big leather flying coat—they didn't want anyone at the airfield to know they were taking me along. It was the day of my baptism. Momma's parents are Quakers, and they don't hold any kind of religious ceremony, but Papà is Roman Catholic and Momma wanted to make him happy. So she agreed to have me baptized if they did my "baptism in air" on the same day. Momma thinks I

might have been the youngest person ever taken for a flight in an aircraft then.

But I don't remember that. What I remember is, when I was five years old, Delia lifting me out of Momma's arms and putting me into the Jenny. Delia was crouching between the wings, and Momma was standing on the ground, holding me up to her. I remember reaching to Delia, how pretty she looked in her leather flying helmet, which was exactly the same dark brown color as her skin, with her hair peeping out around the helmet like a soft, crimped frame for her face. She had on pink lipstick because she and Momma had just finished performing in an air show, and Delia always prettied herself up for the crowd. She lifted me into the plane and plunked me on the seat in the cockpit, squeezing me in next to Teo.

"There they are, in the soup together!" She laughed. "Rhoda, get up here and look at our kids—they are a double act, just like us."

It was the first time they'd ever taken us flying in the US of A because they'd never owned their own plane before. None of the owners of the borrowed planes they flew wanted to get a bad name if their plane being flown by a woman (Momma)—or, even worse, by a Negro woman (Delia)—crashed with a couple of little kids inside. If anything like that had happened, it would have shut down an aircraft owner for good. But now that Delia and Momma owned their own plane fair and square, they could do whatever they wanted.

Momma must have stood on her toes to peep up over the edge of the cockpit, and she and Delia both laughed.

"Tie 'em down," Momma said, and Delia laughed again.

I craned my neck to see Momma hop up onto the fragile body of the aircraft behind us, straddling the fuselage like it was a horse. (Once, when she'd first started wing-walking, she put her foot through the fabric of the lower wing and broke her ankle and couldn't get it out. Delia had to land the plane with Momma all balled up in the wing struts. Delia was the best pilot alive.) Momma watched while Delia tied us down, and I remember Delia doing it—how I felt like I was going to be the safest person in the whole world when she was finished.

I remember Delia's slender, dark fingers and her rose-red varnished nails. On her left hand, there was a shiny pink scar in

the shape of a heart, which she had got when she was learning to fly and spilled hot engine oil on her hand. She strapped us up with white silk aviator scarves because the aircraft harnesses were too big for us; then she tied us together.

“Now, you hold on to each other,” Delia said. “Like this.”

She crossed Teo’s left hand over to mine and crossed my right hand over to his, so our arms were woven together.

“You are going to be the new Black Dove and White Raven, so your two mommas can retire!” Delia told us. Momma laughed. I clung to Teo’s hand because—I remember this *so well*—I thought she’d meant we were supposed to make the plane go, and I was worried that I didn’t know how to. (Now I know she tied us down so that we couldn’t grab hold of the control wheel in front of us. There was one in each cockpit.)

Delia told us, “Now, if you feel scared, just hang on tight to each other and squeeze. Three squeezes means, ‘Are you scared?’ and four squeezes means, ‘I am not scared.’ If you tell each other you’re not scared, you’ll feel brave. Then lean back so you can watch your momma, ’cause she’s going to do the showing off. You know you’ll be safe because I’m going to do the flying!”

I remember feeling *so relieved* it wasn’t going to be up to me.

“Oh, put a cork in it, Del,” Momma said crossly. Delia was always teasing Momma about not being as good a pilot as she was.

Teo repeated in my ear, “Put a cork in it,” because it sounded goofy. We both snickered.

When she’d finished tying us up, Delia pulled on her leather gloves, covering her tiny hands and hiding her pretty nails and her shiny scar. She leaned down and kissed us one at a time, leaving pink lipstick on Teo’s forehead and probably on mine, too, and she said again, “Now you are a double act like me and Rhoda.”

Their double act was not onstage but in the air. They were called the Black Dove (Delia) and the White Raven (Momma), and they did an aerial show together, barnstorming in flying circuses all over the US of A. They did aerobatics (mostly Delia, because she was the better pilot) and wing-walking (mostly Momma, who was not scared of getting out of a flying machine and riding it like a horse while it was in the air). Wing-walking doesn’t mean “walking” so much as it means “daredevil fooling

around outside the airplane while it is flying.” Even just standing up between the cockpits counts. But also doing a handstand over the pilot or eating a picnic lunch on top of the wing. Sometimes Momma did parachute jumps, too. People are always impressed by *anybody* doing stunts like these, but especially a pair of pretty girls.

Black and white, night and day—that was what people used to say. On the ground, when people were watching, Momma and Delia milked that contrast all they could. But on their own and in the sky, they never paid any mind to black and white—they were just two crazy people who loved flying.

“All set, Rhoda?” Delia asked.

Momma answered smartly, “Aye, aye, Cap’n!” because whichever of them was piloting was the captain; and then Delia climbed into the pilot’s seat. Momma was straddling the plane, her wrists twisted into the straps she’d rigged in the wires over our heads as a kind of safety net. Someone on the ground in front of us must have swung the propeller to get the engine going. I remember feeling very excited but not nervous—if I leaned back, I could see Momma perched right behind me. Teo and I hung on with our arms crossed and nudged each other in the ribs.

“We are in the soup together!” I echoed Delia.

“Put a cork in it!” he echoed Momma.

We laughed like cackling chickens. It doesn’t take much when you are five.

And then the plane started to move, and soon it was bumping over the grass, and then, without me or Teo even realizing what was going on, we were flying. We were so little we couldn’t see out of the cockpit. All we could see were Momma’s arms in the straps over our heads and the upper wing like a big sail and the blue sky all around us, and all we could hear were the engine and the wind singing in the wires. And Delia was flying.

That is my earliest memory.

Keep reading for a sneak peek of *The Pearl Thief*!



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Part 1

WHAT HAPPENED 15–28

JUNE 1938

1. An assortment of things gone missing

“You’re a brave lassie.”

That’s what my grandfather told me as he gave me his shotgun.

“Stand fast and guard me,” he instructed. “If this fellow tries to fight, you give him another dose.”

Granddad turned back to the moaning man he’d just wounded. The villain was lying half-sunk in the mud on the edge of the riverbank, clutching his leg where a cartridgeful of lead pellets had emptied into his thigh. It was a late-summer evening, my last with Granddad before I went off to boarding school for the first time, and we’d not expected to shoot anything bigger than a rabbit. But here I was aiming a shotgun at a living man while Granddad waded into the burn, which is what we called the River Fearn where it flowed through his estate, so he could tie the evildoer’s hands behind his back with the strap of his shotgun.

“Rape a burn, would you!” Granddad railed at him while he worked. “I’ve never seen the like! You’ve destroyed that shell bed completely. Two hundred river mussels round about, piled there like a midden heap! And

you've not found a single pearl, have you? Because you don't know a pearl mussel from your own backside! You're like a bank robber that's never cracked a safe or seen a banknote!"

It was true—the man had torn through dozens of river mussels, methodically splitting the shells open one by one in the hope of finding a rare and beautiful Scottish river pearl. The flat rock at the edge of the riverbank was littered with the broken and dying remains.

Granddad's shotgun was almost too heavy for me to hold steady. I kept it jammed against my shoulder with increasingly aching arms. I swear by my glorious ancestors, that man was twice Granddad's size. Of course, Granddad was not a very big man—none of us Murrays are very big. And he was in his seventies, even though he wasn't yet ill. The villain had a pistol—he'd dropped it when he'd been hurt, but it wasn't out of reach. Without me there to guard Granddad as he bound the other man, they might have ended up in a duel. *Brave!* I felt like William Wallace, Guardian of Scotland.

The wounded man was both pathetic and vengeful. "I'll see you in Sheriff Court," he told my grandfather, whining and groaning. "I'm not after salmon and there's no law against pearl fishing, but it's illegal to shoot a man."

Granddad wasn't scared. "This is a private river."

"Those tinker folk take pearls here all the time. They come in their tents and bide a week like gypsies, and go away with their pockets full!"

"No tinker I know would ever rape a burn like this! And they've the decency to ask permission on my private land! There's laws and laws. Respect for a river and its creatures goes unwritten. And the written law says that I can haul you in for poaching on my beat, whether it's salmon or pearls or anything else."

"I didn't—I wasnae—"

"Whisht. Never mind what you were doing in the

water: you pointed your own gun at my wee granddaughter.” Granddad now confiscated the pistol that was lying in the mud, and tucked it into his willow-weave fisherman’s creel. “That’s excuse enough for me. I’m the Earl of Strathfearn. Whose word will the law take, laddie, yours or mine?”

Of course Granddad owned all of Strathfearn then, and the salmon- and trout-fishing rights that went with it. It was a perfect little Scottish estate, with a ruined castle and a baronial manor, nestled in woodland just where the River Fearn meets the River Tay. It’s true it’s not illegal for anyone to fish for pearls there, but it’s still private land. You can’t just wade in and destroy someone else’s river. I remember how shocking Granddad’s accusation sounded: *Rape a burn, would you!*

Was that only three years ago? It feels like Granddad was ill for twice that long. And now he’s been dead for months. And the estate was sold and changed hands, even while my poor grandmother was still living in it. Granddad was so *alive* then. We’d worked together.

“Steady, lass,” he’d said, seeing my arms trembling. I held on while Granddad dragged the unfortunate mussel-bed destroyer to his feet and helped him out of the burn and onto the riverbank, trailing forget-me-nots and muck and blood. I flinched out of his way in distaste.

He’d aimed a pistol at me earlier. I’d been ahead of Granddad on the river path and the strange man had snarled at me: *One step closer and you’re asking for trouble.* I’d hesitated, not wanting to turn my back on his gun. But Granddad had taken the law into his own hands and fired first.

Now, as the bound, bleeding prisoner struggled past me so he could pull himself over to the flat rock and rest amid the broken mussel shells, our eyes met for a moment in mutual hatred. I wondered if he really would have shot at me.

“Now see here,” Granddad lectured him, getting out his hip flask and allowing the wounded man to take a taste of the Water of Life. “See the chimneys rising above the birches at the river’s bend? That’s the County Council’s old library on Inverfearnie Island, and there’s a telephone there. You and I are going to wait here while the lassie goes to ring the police.” He turned to me. “Julie, tell them to send the Water Bailiff out here. He’s the one to deal with a poacher. And then I want you to stay there with the librarian until I come and fetch you. Her name is Mary Kinnaird.”

I gave an internal sigh of relief—not a visible one, because being called *brave* by my granddad was the highest praise I’d ever aspired to, but relief nevertheless. Ringing the police from the Inverfearnie Library was a mission I felt much more capable of completing than shooting a trespasser. I gave Granddad back his shotgun ceremoniously. Then I sprinted for the library, stung by nettles on the river path and streaking my shins with mud. I skidded over the mossy stones on the humpbacked bridge that connects Inverfearnie Island to the east bank of the Fearn, and came to a breathless halt before the stout oak door of the seventeenth-century library building, churning up the gravel of the drive with my canvas shoes as if I were the messenger at the Battle of Marathon.

It was past six and the library was closed. I knew that Mary Kinnaird, the new librarian and custodian who lived there all alone, had only just finished university; but I’d never met her, and it certainly never occurred to me that she wouldn’t be able to hear the bell. When nobody came, not even after I gave a series of pounding kicks to the door, I decided the situation was desperate enough to warrant breaking in and climbing through a window. They were casement windows that opened outward—if I broke a pane near a latch it would be easy to get in. I snatched up a handful of stones from the gravel drive and hurled

them hard at one of the leaded windowpanes nearest the ground. The glass smashed explosively, and I could hear the rocks hitting the floor inside like hailstones.

That brought the young librarian running with a shotgun of her own. She threw open the door.

She was bold as a crow. I stared at her openly, not because of the flat, skewed features of her face, but because she was aiming at my head. The library window I'd smashed was public property. Nothing for it but to plunge in: "Miss Kinnaird?" I panted, out of breath after my marathon. "My granddad has caught a poacher and I—I need to use your telephone—to ring the police."

Her smooth, broad brow crinkled into the tiniest of irritated frowns. She'd sensed the importance of what I'd said, but she hadn't heard all of it. Now she lowered her gun, and I could see that around her neck hung two items essential to her work: a gold mechanical pencil on a slender rope of braided silk, and a peculiar curled brass horn, about the size of a fist, on a thick gold chain. She'd lowered the gun so she could hold the beautiful horn to her ear.

"Your granddad needs help?" she said tartly. "Speak up, please."

"STRATHFEARN HAS CAUGHT A THIEF, AND I NEED TO USE YOUR TELEPHONE," I bellowed into the ear trumpet.

The poor astonished young woman gasped. "Oh! Strathfearn is your grandfather?"

"Aye, Sandy Murray, Earl of Strathfearn," I said with pride.

"Well, you'd better come in," she told me briskly. "I'll ring the police for you."

I wondered how she managed the telephone if she couldn't hear, but I didn't dare to ask.

"Granddad said to send Sergeant Angus Henderson," I said. "He's the Water Bailiff for the Strathfearn estate. He

polices the riverbank.”

“Oh, aye, I know Angus Henderson.”

She shepherded me past the wood-and-glass display cases on the ground floor and into her study. But I poked my head around the door to watch her sitting at the telephone in its dark little nook of a cupboard under the winding stairs. I listened as she asked the switchboard operator to put her through to the police station in the village at Brig O’Fearn. There was a sort of Bakelite ear trumpet attached to the telephone receiver. So that answered my question.

I went and sat down in the big red leather reading chair in Mary Kinnaird’s study, feeling rather stunned and exhausted, and after a few minutes she came in with a tray of tea and shortbread.

“I expect Granddad will pay for your window,” I told her straightaway. I assumed his wealth was limitless, three years ago. I hoped he wouldn’t be angry, and I wondered how he was getting on, waiting alone with the vicious and miserable prisoner. “I’m very sorry I had to break the glass.”

“And I am very sorry I pointed my gun at you.” Mary knelt on the floor beside me, there being no other chair but the one behind her desk. She offered the shortbread. I found I was ravenous.

“Oh, I knew you wouldn’t hurt me,” I told her. “You are too bonny.”

“You wee sook!” she scolded. “Bonny?”

“Not beautiful,” I told her truthfully. “Your face is kind. You’re sort of fluttery and quiet, like a pigeon.”

She threw her head back and laughed.

“Prrrrrt,” she said in pigeon-talk, and this made me laugh too. Suddenly I liked her very much.

“What’s your name?” she asked me.

“Lady Julia Lindsay MacKenzie Wallace Beaufort-Stuart,” I reeled off glibly.

“Oh my, that is quite a name. Must I call you Lady Julia?”

“Granddad calls me Julie.”

“I will compromise with Julia. Beaufort and Stuart are both the names of Scottish queens; I can’t quite lower myself to Julie.” She smiled serenely. “Not Murray? Isn’t that your grandfather’s name?”

“Some of my brothers have Murray as a family name.”

“You know the Murrays were in favor with Mary Stuart. There’s a bracelet on display in the library that belonged to her when she was a child. She gave it to your grandfather’s people because she was their patron, four hundred years ago.”

“Scottish river pearls—I know! Granddad showed me when I was little. They’re the only thing I remember about the display cases. All those dull old books along with this beautiful wee bracelet that belonged to Mary Queen of Scots! And I’m related to her on the Stuart side.”

Mary laughed. “Those books are first editions of Robert Burns’s poems! I don’t find them dull. But the pearls are everybody’s favorite.”

My hidden criminal inner self noted what an idiot the wounded trespasser was, stripping young mussels from the river when this perfect treasure lay in plain sight of the general public every day.

But perhaps the river seemed easier prey than Mary Kinnaird.

She said to me then: “So I’m a Mary and you’re a Stuart. And I have the keys to the case. Would you like to try on Mary Queen of Scots’ pearl bracelet while you wait for your granddad to come back for you?”

Mary Kinnaird suddenly became my favorite person in the entire world.

I noticed something. “How can you hear me without your trumpet?”

“I’m watching your mouth move. It helps a great deal

to see your mouth straight on. I don't like the trumpet much."

"The trumpet is *splendid*."

She twisted her mouth again. It wasn't a smile. "But the trumpet makes me different from everyone else. And I am already a bit different."

"No one's *exactly* alike," I said blithely. "I can find my mother in a candlelit hall full of dancers by the scent she wears. Everybody's different."

It was very easy for me to say, flush with the fear and triumph of my last summer afternoon with my grandfather, the Earl of Strathfearn. I was safe now eating shortbread in the Inverfearnie Library, and looking forward to trying on pearls that had once been worn by Mary Queen of Scots. *Everybody's different*: it was easy for me to say.

"You're a brave lassie!"

It was a perfect echo of Granddad, but of course now it wasn't Granddad and there wasn't a life at stake. It was only the taxi driver congratulating me.

"A lass like you, taking the train alone across Europe! Times have changed."

"I had my own berth on the Night Ferry," I told him modestly. "Men and women are separated."

I didn't tell him I was coming home from my Swiss *boarding school* for the summer holidays—I'd spent the entire trip carefully trying to disguise myself as being closer to twenty than to sixteen. I'd put my hair up in a chignon and hidden my ridiculously babyish panama school hat in a big paper bag. With my childish socks and school blazer crammed into my overnight case and the collar of my blouse undone, and the help of a lipstick bought in the rail station in Paris, I thought I pulled off a believable imitation of someone old enough to have left

school.

“But I did arrange the journey myself,” I couldn’t help boasting. “My people aren’t expecting me for another three days. It may be my own fault I’ve lost my luggage, though. I think it is having its own little secret holiday in a hidden corner of the port at Dunkirk.”

The taxi driver laughed. Now we were on the Perth Road on our way to Strathfearn House. Nearly there—nearly! Scotland, summer, the river, Granddad...

And then that moment when I realized all over again that Granddad was gone forever, and this was the *last* summer at Strathfearn.

“My grandfather died earlier this year, and my grandmother’s selling their house,” I told the taxi driver. “My mother and I are going to help her with the packing up.”

“Oh, aye, Strathfearn House—he was a good man, Sandy Murray, Earl of Strathfearn. I saw in the *Perth Mercury* that the Glenfearn School bought the estate. They’ve been working like Trojans to get the house and grounds ready for the students to move in next term. Lucky lads! Your granddad had a nine-hole golf course out there, didn’t he? Good deal of debt, though—”

Bother the *Mercury*. I hoped they hadn’t published an amount, although I supposed they must have printed some number when the estate went up for sale, including the house and everything in it that my grandmother hadn’t brought with her from France in 1885. She must have been so ashamed. Granddad left tens of thousands of pounds’ worth of debt. Originally he lost a great deal of money when the stock market collapsed in 1929, but then he added to it by borrowing to put a new roof on Strathfearn House; then he’d had to sell parts of the estate to pay back the loan; and then he’d been struck with bone cancer. And the treatment, and the visits to specialists in Europe and America, and the alterations to the house so

he could go on living in it, and the private nurses—

And suddenly I was longing to be at Strathfearn, even if it wasn't ours anymore; longing to see my mother and grandmother and my friend Mary Kinnaird, longing for one last summer of childish freedom on the River Fearn; but also full of grown-up excitement about being included as someone sensible enough to help settle the Murray Estate, when any one of my five big brothers could have done it. I didn't want the summer to begin. I didn't want it to end.

The taxi could not go right up to the house because a digger and a steamroller were engaged in widening the drive. I had to put the fare on my mother's account, but the driver just laughed and said he knew where to find us. I got out to walk the last third of a mile.

The first person I recognized was Sergeant Angus Henderson, the Water Bailiff whom Granddad sent for to take custody of the pearl thief we caught. Henderson was there with his bicycle, with his tall hooked cromach across the bars as if he were about to do a high-wire act and needed a long stick to balance him. He was having a row with the driver of the steamroller.

"I've told you before to keep your men off the path by the Fearn when they're ditch-digging!" the Water Bailiff roared. "Bad enough the place is crawling with those dirty tinker folk camped up in Inchfort Field, in and out the water looking for pearls. That river path to the Inverfearnie Library is off-limits to your men."

"Those men are digging the pipeline for the new swimming pool—how d'you expect them to stay off the river path?" steamed the roller driver. "All the work is downstream of Inverfearnie. I dinnae want them mixed up with those sleekit tinkers anyway. Bloody light-fingered sneaks. You'd not believe how many tools go missing, spades and whatnot."

I did not want to get caught in the cross fire of this

battle. Sergeant Angus Henderson is a terrifyingly tall and gaunt ex-Black Watch Regiment policeman. Granddad told us that in the heat of the Great War, Henderson allegedly shot one of his own men in the back for running away from a battle, and then strangled a German officer, an enemy Hun, with his bare hands.

“I’m off down the Fearn path now, and if I catch any of your men there—” Henderson let the threat hang, but gave his cromach a shake.

The Water Bailiff had been known to thrash every single one of my five brothers for some reason or other in the past—guddling for rainbow trout out of the brown trout season, or swimming when the salmon were running, or just for getting in his way as he patrolled the narrow path along the burn on his bicycle.

I stepped back so I was well out of his way as he set off along the drive ahead of me. When he’d become nothing but a dark beetling shape among the bright green beeches, I held tight to my small overnight case and set off after him, considerably more slowly. I was looking forward to getting out of my modified school uniform if I could. But the dark skirt and white blouse did give me a smart official air, like a post office clerk or a prospective stenographer for the Glenfearn School, and the men working on the drive paid no attention to me.

My grandmother’s roses in the French forecourt garden in front of Strathfearn House were blooming in a glorious, blazing riot of June color, oblivious to the chaos throughout the rest of the grounds. There were people all about, hard at work building new dormitories and classrooms and playing fields. None of them were people I recognized. I let myself into the house—the doors were wide open.

The whole of the baronial reception hall had been emptied of its rosewood furniture and stripped of the ancestral paintings. I felt as though I had never been there

before in my life.

I went straight to my grandmother's favorite sitting room and discovered it was also in disarray; and my remaining family members were nowhere to be found. Of course I hadn't told anyone I was coming three days earlier than expected. So like a hunted fox bolting to the safety of its den, I sought out the nursery bathroom high in the back of the east wing, and drew myself a bath because I had been travelling for three days and the hot water seemed to be working as usual.

I didn't have any clean clothes of my own to change into, but it is a good big bathroom, and in addition to a six-foot-long tub and painted commode there is a tall chest full of children's cast-offs. I put on a mothly tennis pullover which left my arms daringly bare and a kilt that must have been forgotten some time ago by one of my big brothers (probably Sandy, who was Granddad's favorite, his namesake and his heir, and who had spent more time there than the rest of us).

I was David Balfour from *Kidnapped* again, the way I'd been the whole summer I was thirteen, to my brothers' amusement and my nanny Solange's despair. I plaited my hair and stuffed it up under a shapeless faded wool tam-o'-shanter to get it out of my face, and wove my way through the passages back to the central oak staircase.

The banisters were covered with dust sheets because the walls had just been painted a modern cool, pale blue—not horrible, but so *different* from the heraldic Victorian wallpaper. Light in shades of lemon and sapphire and scarlet spilled through the tall stained-glass window on the landing. As I turned the corner, the telephone in the hall below me started to ring.

I swithered on the landing, wondering if I should answer it. But then I heard footsteps and a click, and the ringing stopped, and a harassed man's voice said, "Yes, this is he—No, they're not gypsies; they're tinkers. Scottish

Travellers. It's tiresome, but they're allowed to stay in that field till the end of this summer—" The voice took a sudden change of tone and continued brightly: "Oh, you've sent the Water Bailiff up there *now*? My foreman thinks they're pretty bold thieves—wants him to check all their gear for missing tools—Jolly good!" His footsteps thumped smartly back the way they'd come.

Goodness, everyone seemed to have it in for the Travelling folk.

This Scottish traveller didn't bother anybody. If the ditch-diggers were all downstream and the Water Bailiff was off bothering the campers at Inchfort Field, I could count on having the river path to the library on Inverfearnie Island all to myself. I thought I would go say hello to Mary Kinnaird, who would not care if I was wearing only a kilt and a tennis pullover.

I crossed the broad lawn, broken by men smoothing earth and digging pits and laying paths. In the distance by the edge of the River Tay, over the tops of the birch trees, I could see the ruinous towers of Aberfearn Castle. The Big House is new by comparison; it was built in 1840, before Granddad was born. Before the railway came through. It was hard to believe that none of this was ours anymore.

I passed into the dapple of sunlight and shade in the birchwood by the river.

An otter slid into the burn as I started along the path, and I saw a kingfisher darting among the low branches trailing in the water on the opposite bank. For a moment I stood still, watching and breathing it in. The smell of the Tay and the Fearn! Oh, how I'd missed it, and how I would miss it after this last summer! See me, kilted and barefoot on the native soil of my ancestors, declaiming Allan Cunningham in dramatic rhapsody:

O hame, hame, hame, to my ain countree!

When the flower is i' the bud and the leaf is on the tree,

The larks shall sing me hame in my ain countrie!

I crossed from the west bank of the Fearn to Inverfearnie Island by the footbridge. It is a creaky old iron suspension bridge so narrow you can't pass two abreast, erected in the year of Queen Victoria's Jubilee. I jumped along its span to make it sway, the way my brothers and I had always done when we were little. The library stood proud on the unnatural mound of Inverfearnie Island, which Granddad always told us might hide a Bronze Age burial site beneath it. The oak front door of the library was locked, just as it had been three years ago.

This time, knowing Mary much better than I used to, I went round to the kitchen door. It was standing ajar.

"MARY?"

I let myself in, hollering, because she can never hear you.

The kitchen was tidy and empty. I went through to her study, yelling my friend's name. She wasn't there, either, and it was also tidy and empty, as if she hadn't been in all day.

I glanced into the telephone cupboard with its red velvet stool, in the dark little nook under the winding stairs. No one. I went through to the library.

The library is two rooms on top of each other, the walls surrounded by shelves and scarcely a single book newer than before the Great War, apart from recent volumes of antiquarian journals and almanacs. But they still lend books to anglers and Scots-language scholars and farmers trying to solve boundary disputes, and there is almost always someone or other studying in the Upper Reading Room.

I spared a reverent glance for the pearl bracelet. It lay locked under glass on its bed of black velvet, on permanent loan to the Perth and Kinross Council for

display in the library here. I couldn't quite believe Mary had let me try those pearls on. They were beautiful fat Tay river pearls, so pale a gray they shone nearly like silver, the size of small marbles. Staring into the glass until it began to get fogged by my own breath, I could remember exactly how they'd felt against my wrist, cool and heavy with the magic of having been worn by Mary Stuart herself, whose surname I shared, as young as me and already Queen of Scotland.

I wiped the glass and turned away to continue the hunt for my own living Mary. I took the narrow winding steps to the Upper Reading Room of the library two at a time.

"AHOY, MARY!"

And the Upper Reading Room was empty, too.

But here was a strange thing. The Upper Reading Room was empty, but unlike the rest of Mary Kinnaird's domain, it was not tidy. The great big chestnut table was covered end to end in ephemera and artifacts. I recognized these as what my brothers and I called "the Murray Hoard": intriguing archaeological finds that our grandfather used to keep on display in the tower room at Strathfearn House. I guessed that this must be a grand sorting job, with Mary called upon to catalog the priceless ancient pieces before they went to auction. Iron and bronze spear tips, all different sizes and shapes, lay in rows, with more waiting in cigar boxes; I recognized an iridescent Roman glass vial shaped like a leaping fish, which was, Granddad told me, nearly two thousand years old; and the dark polished stone ax heads were eerily three times that.

And there was my favorite item, a small round cup made of blackened wood set in silver filigree. I could picture it sitting in a back corner of a dusty glass case in the tower of the Big House, full to the brim with loose pearls like the ones on the bracelet downstairs. I had never been allowed to touch the cup, but Granddad had let me play with the pearls when I was very small.

My mother's mother's mother's, he'd said they were. I can't remember how many "mothers" back they went. All those pearls were found in Scottish rivers. I'd loved the way that, of all the ancient artifacts in his collection, only the pearls didn't look old. Like the royal pearls downstairs, they were as beautiful and ageless as the rivers where they'd been grown.

Now the cup was empty. The pearls were gone. Another wave of sadness washed over me. I'd felt instinctively that they belonged in that cup. Granddad must have sold them, as he'd sold so many of his heirlooms and so much of his land, to keep the estate going during his illness.

I was surprised that Mary would have gone out leaving a door open with all this valuable stuff lying about. She takes her job as the Inverfearnie Library custodian very seriously.

I poked my nose into the other rooms, her bedroom and the bathroom, but Mary was nowhere to be found.

I decided to leave her a note. I went back up to where she'd been working. There was paper everywhere, but all covered with lists and descriptions of artifacts. Finally I settled on an empty brown envelope addressed to my grandfather and postmarked "Oxford" from two years ago. The back was engraved with the name of a scholar I'd never heard of from the Ashmolean Museum. The envelope had been slit open with a knife or letter opener long ago, and whatever message it had once contained was not lying about in an obvious place. It didn't seem important in any way, so I wrote to Mary on the back quickly to say that I was home in Scotland and staying at Strathfearn House for the next few weeks, and that I would stop in again to visit.

Here was another odd thing. When I went to prop my message against a chipped clay pot of unknown origin, in front of the pushed-back chair where Mary would be sure

to see it when she came back, a pearl fell out of the envelope.

I thought it dropped off *me* at first—as if I'd been wearing it in my hair, or as an earring! It was the palest rose-petal pink, the size of a barley grain and perfectly round. It hit the green baize table cover with a sound like *pip* and lay still. It was intact and beautiful.

I picked it up—it was so round I had to wedge it beneath my fingernail to get hold of it. It must have been part of the collection. I thought of dropping it into the black wooden cup. But sensibly afraid of disturbing the cataloging system, I put it back inside the envelope it had fallen out of. I folded the envelope over so the pearl couldn't fall out again and propped it against one of the jam jars.

I went back outside, leaving the kitchen door a little open behind me the way I'd found it. The hammering and drilling and tractoring going on at the Big House and farther downstream was no more than a faint hum. I didn't feel like going back to the Big House. I thought I'd go look at the Drookit Stane and the Salmon Stane, the standing stones in the river and Inchfort Field, just to make sure the builders hadn't knocked them down to make an access road or boat ramp or something. Maybe I'd just peek at the one in Inchfort Field without leaving the birchwood. I didn't want to get mixed up with the Water Bailiff.

I went down the gravel driveway and crossed the humped bridge of moss-covered stone, as old as the seventeenth-century library itself, that leads to the opposite bank of the Fearn. Then I continued along the path on the other side of the river.

Where the burn bends it has scooped out a little shingle beach on one bank where we used to swim. There was a heron standing midstream near the tall Drookit Stane, absolutely still, fixed on fishing. Its shadow was

dark against the stone and its reflection rippled in the water. I stopped still, too—but not still enough. It heard me and lifted off awkwardly, heading downstream with long, slow wingbeats.

I sat down on the flat sun-dappled rock slab where the wounded poacher had rested, and where Granddad had taught me and my brothers to guddle for trout. I wondered if I could still catch a fish using only my hands. No one was about, not even the heron, and I was overcome with a wave of sadness over my grandfather and his house and his things that weren't ours anymore, and all the summers that would never come back.

So I lay down and slid my bare arm into the clear brown water.

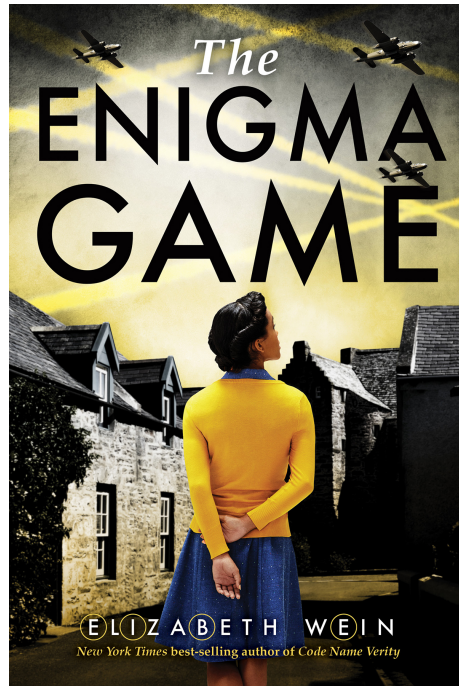
There. I was minding my own business, waiting for a fish to tickle. I suppose I didn't really have any right to fish there, because it wasn't our land any longer. Julie the poacher!

I thought about the pearls that I'd never see again, and all my grandmother had lost. I thought about picking an armful of her own roses for her. The plan improved: I'd have to dig some up so she could take them with her when she had to leave the house for good.

I'd not slept well on the trains across Europe. I'd been travelling for three days. I was lying in the sun and lulled by the sound of running water, and I fell asleep thinking about roses.

I remember what it looked like when my head exploded with light and darkness, but I didn't remember anything else until the moment I found myself in St. John's Infirmary in Perth three days later.

Turn the page for a sneak preview of



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Part 1

ODYSSEUS

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Flight Lieutenant James G. Beaufort-Stuart:

The night of 6–7 November 1940—how many of us dead in that raid?

I don't know.

I know nine men in 648 Squadron's A-Flight were killed that night just because of *weather*. Two planes collided in fog just before landing, and one came down heavy with ice. But I don't know how many in A-Flight fell to enemy fire.

How many in B-Flight, then? My own lads... I ought to know that, at least.

But I don't. Not offhand. I'd have to sit and count. I probably made a note in my logbook. That night wasn't the first time we took a heavy loss, and it wasn't the last time. *Buckets of blood*. It wasn't as many as last time. Anyway it's hard to remember all the losses, which for Bristol Blenheim bomber crews was just about every mission, and I get some of the dead men muddled when I try to count. The Royal Air Force isn't going to win the war flying Bristol Blenheims.

I'd argued with Wing Commander Talbot Cromwell before we took off on that mission. That wasn't the first time, either. I knew he didn't like me, and I risked an official reprimand, or worse, a demotion, every time I challenged him. We didn't see eye to eye on *anything*.

"We'll never find German warships if we're flying at twenty thousand feet!" I told my commanding officer. I didn't even try to hide my anger. "There's no hope in hell of a Blenheim hitting anything from that height anyway. The bomb doors don't always open when you want them to, and up there you can't tell whether a speck out the window is an enemy destroyer or a bit of runway mud stuck on the Perspex!"

"Are you quite finished, Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart?" said Cromwell, lowering his eyebrows like barrier gates. "You'll fly at twenty thousand feet, and so will all your men. Orders are orders. That's where Coastal Command wants you to fly. I take

my instructions from headquarters and you take yours from me.”

Cromwell and I had been at each other since the day we first came together about two weeks earlier.

He got transferred to us in October when we moved to Shetland as the Battle of Britain came to an end. Our squadron patrolled the North Sea for the Royal Air Force, the RAF, just as we’d done at other bases all through the summer of 1940. But Cromwell’s role with 648 Squadron was new. Before he got lumbered with us, he’d commanded a squadron of speedy new Spitfire fighters. In August and September, while we were flying Blenheims under cover of cloud on low-level bombing raids targeting German ships, he’d been sending fighter pilots into soaring dogfights in the sun.

None of our experiences matched up. He couldn’t manage twin engines and didn’t join us when we flew. And he didn’t like it that at nineteen years old I was half his age, shorter and slighter than most of the other lads and barely needing a shave, yet I talked back. He didn’t like that all of B-Flight were on my side because they were Blenheim airmen too; maybe I looked like a schoolboy, but they knew I wasn’t. I’d been their flight leader since August.

And sending us on a bombing raid with only a half-moon to light us, above cloud at twenty thousand feet? I was reckless with frustration.

“It’s stupid, *stupid*—everyone knows it. The men are complaining. *You* know it’s stupid. *Above the cloud?* We won’t be able to see the sea, let alone ships in the dark! And the air’s too thin up there for a Blenheim to operate efficiently. It’s not like flying a Spitfire! We cruise best at fifteen thousand feet, and when we’re in combat we take it as low as we can, it helps camouflage us. And the Jerries—the German fighters all *know* they can go higher and faster, and they circle like vultures, *waiting*—”

“None of my Spitfire pilots complained about danger,” Cromwell said coldly. “I expect more of a young man of your caliber, *Beaufort-Stuart*. This sounds like lack of moral fiber.”

Lack of moral fiber—that wonderful euphemism for

cowardice.

I couldn't let him accuse me, or worse, my 648 Squadron airmen, of being cowards.

I said stiffly, "Sir. I'm leading B-Flight on a mission tonight. I want the best for them."

"When you go in at low level, you get shot up by enemy anti-aircraft guns," Cromwell told me, as if I didn't know. "We need to change our tactics."

It was true that most of our losses came from guns on the ground or at sea level. I couldn't argue with that. But I felt sure that a raid at twenty thousand feet would end in the same tears for different reasons, or at best, be completely pointless because we wouldn't hit anything. It wasn't the first time Coastal Command had tried it.

However, with no winning counterargument, off we went, hoping a few of us would make it back safely in five hours or so. Following orders.

The Blenheims were like a herd of shadowy brontosauri waiting on the airfield in the dark beneath the high cloud.

"Come on, Scotty, buck up," said David Silvermont, my navigator, as we lowered ourselves in our bulky flight suits through the forward hatch of that night's plane. Being the only Scot in the squadron meant that I mostly hadn't been called Jamie for the past year or so, except on leave. "We can't have you in a funk—it brings everybody down. The lads take your moods very seriously."

"Wing Commander Cromwell bloody well doesn't," I retorted. "I wish he'd have a go at you sometime instead of me."

"No chance, as you're the officer in charge. Anyway I am much bigger and older than you, and better looking too and probably smarter, so he doesn't dare."

"And you have a bigger head than me!" I laughed.

Most of those things were true, as David Silvermont was two years my senior and had been halfway through a medical degree when the war started. But he was also my best friend. He was easy to like and smooth with girls, with the brooding dark looks of a film star, and was good at breaking up fights and at making me laugh. Silver read poetry before he went to bed; he

played Mozart on the cracked fiddle he'd found in the officers' lounge when we were off duty; but those highbrow occupations didn't stop him plotting a course by dead reckoning, or spotting enemy convoys, or having a sense of humor.

He was a wizard navigator.

"What's up?" called our air gunner and wireless operator, Colin Oldham, from his place in the back of the Blenheim.

"Just the usual scrapping with Cromwell," I grumbled. "Accused me of 'lack of moral fiber.'"

"Rubbish! *He's* not flying tonight, is he!" Colin exclaimed.

"I expect he doesn't like your poncey double-barreled surname," Silver teased me. "It reminds the old Roundhead that your dad's the Earl of Craigie, and then he wants to start the Civil War over again. Can't have teenage toffs telling him what to do."

Colin howled. "'The Old Roundhead!' Suits him!"

"I don't tell him what to do," I protested, checking the instruments and controls while Silver and Colin belted their harnesses in place. "I make polite suggestions about what *not* to do. And being the youngest of five sons doesn't mean a thing. They ran out of titles before they got to me."

"It's your classical education he doesn't like," put in Colin.

"I'll make a list, shall I? Perhaps if I were taller or bigger or grew a mustache—"

"He doesn't like me much, either," Silver said with sympathy.

"You both make him feel inferior," said Colin. "All that heady talk in the officers' lounge comparing hydraulics to blood pressure. He can't keep up."

"Hydraulics and blood pressure are endlessly fascinating," said Silver. He spread his chart on his knees, holding his electric torch ready in his gauntleted hand. He declared with satisfaction, "From tonight I shall always think of him as the Old Roundhead."

My B-Flight aircrews knew what we were doing that night—three planes in my own Pimms Section and three in Madeira Section, with three men in each plane. In a few minutes I'd be

in the sky in the dark in charge of eighteen men, counting myself, and in a few hours half of them would be dead.

I didn't know then what the full toll of that night would be, and I tried to lighten the tone as we set out. I called over the radio to Pimms and Madeira as we took off. "Setting course for target and climbing to twenty thousand feet, as per orders from the Old Roundhead."

Over the intercom I heard Colin behind me laughing again.

"The Old Roundhead might be keeping a listening watch," Silver warned me.

"I don't mind. I'll get another damned reprimand. He already knows what I think of him."

We flew obediently high, heading for a flotilla of German warships that was supposed to be cruising fifty miles off the Norwegian coast. After about an hour and a half, maybe we were over the ships we were supposed to hit and maybe we weren't. The sky was clear and blue-black, but the half-moon lit the thin cloud below us like a sheet of milky Chinese silk. I could see the other B-Flight planes standing out in black silhouette like decals against that cloud.

So, too, could the German Messerschmitt 110 night fighters on patrol.

We didn't have lights and neither did they, and we didn't see them coming. They can fly a hundred miles an hour faster than we can. But Silver and I both saw the streaks of green flame as the tracers flew from the first rounds of their thundering guns. And we saw the explosion of golden fire as the bullets struck an engine on another Blenheim in our formation.

Silver opened the observer's panel in the window next to his head and twisted around to stick his nose out so he could see behind us. "There's one on our tail!" he cried. "Dive, dive—"

"Down, *everybody get down!*" I called to my lads over the radio. "Use the cloud! Get into it or below it where they can't see you! Drop your bombs if you have to, lose the weight—"

I pushed my own plane into a nosedive. Our only hope against an Me-110 was to get away from it. Hide in cloud, camouflage yourself against the earth's surface. For a moment, behind me, I could hear Colin's gun rattling back at our

attackers.

In a Blenheim, the air gunner has to sit with his head up out of the plane in a bubble of Perspex like a goldfish bowl on a windowsill. The gunner's turret is often the first thing that goes when the Jerries are after you. And that's exactly what happened that night, with a deafening bang that I felt more than heard. *God*. The wind in the cockpit, after our turret exploded, howling around us as we sped toward the black sea below. The mess of blood and bone that had been Colin, all over the inside of the plane and the back of Silver's leather helmet.

That missed me, anyway—I was protected from Colin by the bulkhead between the pilot's seat and the radio equipment.

The sky went small and gray. I was diving too fast—in another few seconds the increased gravity would knock us out.

I must have leveled up somehow.

I skimmed so low over the sea, when I reached it, that the poor Blenheim's tail wheel snagged in a swell and snapped off.

In front of us, seawater erupted like a geyser as someone overhead got rid of their explosives, and I was too close to the surface to turn away from the plumbing waterspout. I had to fly through it. We lost windowpanes in the front cockpit and Silver's charts were soaked, but we were still flying on the other side.

We were being bombed by our *own planes*.

We saw two Blenheims go plummeting in flames into the water around us while we struggled away from the waves.

It was the morning of 7 November 1940, and I was so stunned and spent after I landed back at our base in Shetland that I couldn't think. I shut down the engines, and Silver and I sat in silence. We didn't even try to get out.

Then a couple of mechanics climbed on the wing to open the hatches, and Silver looked up. He put a hand on my shoulder and said softly, "Nice flying, Scotty, as per usual. Thanks for getting us home."

He'd taken off his gloves to rescue the charts and to use the pencils and flight calculator on the way back. His hands must have been freezing. But he made the same cheesy joke every

time we landed safely—he'd be able to play the violin again. He pulled the little box of rosin from his knee pocket, the lucky charm that went with him on every op, and held it between thumb and forefinger with both hands in front of his face.

"Look, everything still in one piece."

He couldn't *not* say it. He couldn't *not* take the rosin with him. I had a charm too, in the breast pocket of my uniform beneath my flight suit, a perfectly round quartz pebble from the Iron Age hill fort on my father's grouse moor.

"You're welcome," I croaked.

Our clothes were soaked with seawater and Colin Oldham's blood. It was all over the cockpit, and we had to climb through it to get out the hatch.

Half an hour later I sat down in front of Flight Officer Phyllis Pennyworth, our brisk, chirpy robin of a Women's Auxiliary Air Force interrogator who was in charge of grilling us after a mission—and I got so choked up I couldn't talk. I sat for a while with my elbows on my knees and my head in my hands, and she just let me do that, didn't say anything, knew what was coming—or guessed, anyway.

When I looked up, the pretty pink had faded a bit from her rosy cheeks. She loved us all very much. But in the debriefing room Pennyworth took care to be all business, and this time I was too broken and beat to do my job politely.

"Too many German planes to count," I told her. "Bloody Jerries in their bloody Messerschmitt 110s. Those Luftwaffe night fighters. Like a swarm of hornets—they know where we're coming from and what we're after, and they're a million miles an hour faster than us—"

"Not a million, Scotty," Phyllis corrected gently. Using my nickname instead of my rank title the way most of my lads did, so that I knew she cared, but reminding me to be precise so she could make an accurate report. She was a stickler for rules herself, and she was scared of the Old Roundhead.

"Might as well be a million." It came out as a sort of sob. "These old Blenheims we fly, these airborne buckets of bolts we're in, these crates don't have a chance against a Messerschmitt 110 night fighter!"

And I gave a real sob then, because of Colin.

I didn't tell Phyllis Pennyworth about the mess. She'd seen our busted-up plane—half the glass in the front cockpit punched out, a furrow plowed in the airfield behind us by our tail because we'd lost the tail wheel, the gaping hole where the gunner's turret used to be. She wasn't stupid; she knew what had happened to Colin. She waited while I tried to pull myself together, and when I still didn't say anything, she sighed and put down her pen and lit a cigarette for me.

I took it and my hands didn't shake. I hadn't lost my nerve—I was angry. Not just at the Germans, our enemy. I was angry at my commanding officer, at Wing Commander Talbot Cromwell, for being so blind to what we were up against, and at Coastal Command itself, whoever they were, making impossible rules in some comfortable headquarters in England while we bled our lives out in unforgiving sky and sea.

I tried to smoke. Phyllis passed me her ashtray. I was nearly angry at her, too, behaving herself and reporting to them. But she was good at her job, unlike Cromwell; she'd been with us since June and she knew us well.

"When we fly that high the mission is absolutely pointless, but when we come in at a low level to bomb the German ships, we get shot up by their antiaircraft guns," I said bitterly. "I just want an advantage, you know? I want to know where their submarines are, or if there are night fighters about, before they're on top of us. Some wee thing. *One thing* that we can do better than the Germans. One surprising smack in their faces."

"We stopped the invasion," Phyllis said. "You helped too, two months ago when we were fighting the Battle of Britain. We made them back off. That was a smack in their faces."

"Now they're bombing our cities to blazes—that's not backing off!"

"We all want revenge," Phyllis said softly.

That surprised me a little. I didn't think of earnest, diligent Flight Officer Pennyworth as someone who had unwholesome emotions that might involve a thirst for blood. I glanced up at her, thinking she might be offering mechanical sympathy to another shot-down airman—or I suppose I should say *shot up*,

not *shot down*, as I'd managed to bring the crate back and land it in one piece.

Her eyes were red and her mouth was set in a stubborn, steely pout. I guess Flight Officer Pennyworth got the job partly because she didn't cry easily. Maybe she did want revenge.

"We'll win," Phyllis said firmly. "We'll keep fighting, and someday we'll win fair and square."

I'd let my cigarette go out. I dumped it in the ashtray. What had Cromwell told me?

We need to change our tactics.

"I don't want to win fair and square anymore," I said through my teeth. *"I want to cheat."*

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Maddie's Mittens

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(From *Essentials for the Forces*, scanned by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, under “1940s Patterns to Knit” at <http://www.vam.ac.uk/images/image/13069popup.html>)



ROSE UNDER FIRE

Elizabeth Wein

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF CODE NAME VERITY

ROSE UNDER FIRE

Elizabeth Wein



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
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OceanofPDF.com

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LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
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TO A YOUNG POET

Time cannot break the bird's wing from the bird.
Bird and wing together
Go down, one feather.

No thing that ever flew,
Not the lark, not you,
Can die as others do.

—Edna St. Vincent Millay

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id harder to get supplies to the front lines because
: at Calais, Le Havre, Boulogne, etc. They realize wha
es to have to ferry fuel, food, spare parts, blood an
mandy and then truck it two hundred miles north up
h coast—especially with the train lines and bridges
e Roger comes in, getting them to rig up temporary
nto France without being shot at, and you certainly c
iege. It is being pounded. We are doing it ourselves.

Part 1
it it will have to be re before it's any use to us.
rt at the Ritz y **SOUTHAMPTON** makes the Hotel H
fly fair. Thank goodness for my uniform—I don't have
remotely suitable, but in uniform you don't ever have
clothes I wore to Maddie's wedding (in fact I wore n
is wedding is not as sharp-looking as it used to be,
ver feel out of place or underdressed in uniform. Ed
ie's had any new clothes for a while, either, but she
she is always so stylish—she kissed me on both che
at my hands because I wasn't wearing gloves (they d
t. We didn't talk about French cities being liberated—
hile she is presiding over white linen and silver in the
ist date with Nick. "I like your Nick," she commented
ed. "That's exactly the word I think of, too. Did I te
married before he got sent off to wherever he is now
s disappoint him, but—" "But it's not a charm. He wor
o him, and if you're really going to choose a boy you
do together, there's no good reason to rush into ma

Rose Moyer Justice

August 2, 1944

Hamble, Hampshire

NOTES FOR AN ACCIDENT REPORT

I just got back from Celia Forester's funeral. I'm supposed to be writing up an official report for the Tempest she flew into the ground, since she's obviously not going to write it herself, and I saw it happen. And also because I feel responsible. I know it wasn't my fault—I really do know that now. But I briefed her. We both had Tempests to deliver, and I'd flown one a couple of times before. Celia hadn't. She took off ten minutes after me. If she'd taken off first, we might both still be alive.

I've never had to do a report like this, and I don't really know where to begin. Maddie gave me this beautiful leather-bound notebook to draft it in; she thinks it helps to have nice paper, and knew I wouldn't buy any for myself, since, like everything else, it's so scarce. She says you need to bribe yourself because it's always *blah* writing up accident reports. She had to write a big report herself last January and also be grilled in person by the Accident Committee. She's right about nice paper, of course, and I have filled up a couple of those pretty cloth-bound diaries that lock; but all I ever put in them are attempts at poetry. Too bad I can't put the accident report into verse.

There were a few other Air Transport Auxiliary pilots at Celia's funeral, but Maddie was the only ATA girl besides me. Felicyta couldn't come; she had a delivery chit this morning. Along with Celia and Felicyta, Maddie and I were the ones who gave out Mrs. Hatch's strawberries to the soldiers lining up to board the landing craft for the D-Day invasion. It made us into friends. Felicyta was very tearful this morning, banging things around angrily. Probably she shouldn't be flying. I know exactly what Daddy would say—three thousand miles away on Justice Field in Pennsylvania—if it was me: "Rosie, go home. You

shouldn't fly while your friends are being buried." But the planes have got to be delivered. *There's a war on.*

Boy, am I sick of hearing that.

It never stops. There are planes to deliver every day straight from the factory or just overhauled, painted in fresh camouflage or invasion stripes, ready to go to France. I got thrown in at the deep end when I stepped off the ship from New York three months ago, and before the end of May I was delivering Spitfires, real fighter planes, from Southampton's factories near the Hamble Aerodrome to just about every airbase in southern England. I was supposed to get some training, but they just put me through a few flight tests instead. Being the daughter of someone who runs a flight school has paid off in spades—I've been flying since I was twelve, which means I've been flying longer than some of the older pilots, even though I'm only eighteen. The baby on the team.

There was a lull for a week after D-Day, when the invasion started. Actually, I don't think it should be called an "invasion" when really we are trying to get most of Europe back from the Germans, who invaded it in the first place. Our Allied soldiers left for France in the beginning of June, and for one week only military flights got authorized, so there was no flying for us—the Air Transport Auxiliary in Britain are civilian pilots, like the WASPs at home. That was a quiet week, the second week of June. Then the flying bombs started coming in.

Holy smoke, I can't say how much I hate the flying bombs.

V-1 is what the Germans call them. V stands for "*Vergeltungswaffe*", retaliation weapon. I worked hard at memorizing the real word for it, because I always think it means *vengeance*: Vengeance Weapon No. 1. The only thing these bombs are meant to do is terrify people. Everyone puts on a brave face, though—the English are very good at putting on a brave face, I'll give them that! People try to make the bombs less scary by giving them stupid names: *doodlebugs*—sounds like baby talk. *Buzz bombs*—a phrase for older kids to use. The other ferry pilots call them *pilotless planes*, which should seem simple and technical, but it gives me the creeps. An aircraft flying blind, no cockpit, no windows, no way of landing except to self-destruct? How can you win an air war against a plane that

doesn't need a pilot? A plane that turns into a bomb? Our planes, the British and American aircraft I fly every day in the ATA, don't even have radios, much less guns. We don't stand a chance. Celia Forester didn't stand a chance.

At the funeral, the local minister—vicar, they say here—had never even met Celia. He called her “a dedicated pilot.”

It doesn't mean *anything*. We're *all* dedicated. But to tell the truth, I don't think any of us would have had anything better to say. Celia was so quiet. She was only just posted to Hamble in May, about the same time I was, and for the same reason—to ferry planes for the invasion. She hardly ever talked to *anybody*. I can't blame her—she had a fiancé who was in Bomb Disposal and was killed at Christmas. It's bad enough being a newcomer without being stuck grieving for your boyfriend. Celia wasn't very happy here.

Am I happy here?

I guess I am. I like what I'm doing. I wanted to come so *badly*—I can't believe they gave me that diploma in December, like Laura Ingalls Wilder leaving school at fifteen so she could be a teacher! And now here I am, in England for the first time, not far from where Daddy was born, and I'm actually helping. I'm *useful*. Even without Uncle Roger being so high up in the Royal Engineers, cutting through the red tape for me, I'd have found a way to get here. And I'm a lot luckier than Celia in other ways, not just because I'm still alive—I'm lucky to have met Nick almost as soon as I got here, and lucky to have had so much flying experience before I started.

I've read over that last paragraph and it sounds so chirpy and stuck-up and—just so dumb. But the truth is I have to keep reminding myself again and again that I want to do this, because I'm so tired now. None of us ever get enough sleep. Not just because we're working so hard; it's those horrible flying bombs, too.

The tiredness is beginning to show. We're all cracking at the seams, I think. Maddie and I ended up being taken out to lunch by Celia's parents after the funeral, because Maddie had still been sitting in our pew sobbing quietly into her handkerchief after everyone else had left, and I was sitting with her and sniffing a bit, too. I am sure the Foresters were touched

to find anyone showing so much raw emotion at their daughter's short, bleak funeral, when everyone else there hardly knew her.

But neither one of us had actually been crying for Celia. On the train back to Southampton, Maddie confessed to me, "My best friend was killed in action, in 'enemy action,' like it always says in the obituaries, exactly eight months ago. She didn't get a funeral."

"My gosh," I said. I can't really imagine what it must feel like to have your best friend killed by a bomb or gunfire. So I added, "Well, it was brave of you to come along today!"

Maddie said, "I felt like a *rat* eating lunch with the Foresters. So cheap and ugly. Them paying for the meal and me trying to think of *anything* to say about Celia apart from 'She was a nice girl but she never talked to anybody.'"

"I know. I felt that way too. Look, we're both rats, Maddie—I was being more selfish than you. I couldn't think about anything all day except having to write the darned accident report. Celia had never been up in a Tempest before, and we only had one set of pilot's notes between us, and she refused to take them with her. I should have forced her to take them. And I bet now they won't let any other girls near a Tempest till the accident's been investigated, and if we don't get to fly 'em again it'll be MY FAULT as much as Celia's."

"They'll let us fly 'em," Maddie said mournfully. "Desperate times, and all that."

She's probably right. The fighter pilots need all the Tempests they can get. They're the best planes we've got for shooting down flying bombs.

When Maddie and I got back to the aerodrome at Hamble, Felicyta was waiting for us. She was sitting in a corner of the Operations Room and had made a little funeral feast. She had a plate of toast cut up into one-inch squares with a bit of margarine and the tiniest blob of strawberry jam on each square—simple but pretty.

"We make do with not much, as usual," Felicyta said, and tried to smile. "Here are teacups. Was it terrible?"

I nodded. Maddie grimaced.

“Celia’s mother says we should share the things from her locker,” I said. “Mrs. Forester doesn’t want any of it back.”

Now we all grimaced.

“Someone’s got to do it,” I said. Maddie began pouring tea, and Felicyta touched me lightly on the shoulder, like she wanted to support me but was a little embarrassed to show it. She gave an odd, tight smile and said, “I will take care of Celia’s locker. You must report this accident, Rosie?”

“Yes, I’m writing the accident report. Lucky me.”

“These papers are for you.” Felicyta patted a cardboard file folder on the table’s worn oilcloth. “It is a letter from the mechanic who examined Celia’s plane after her crash. He gave it to me when I flew there this morning. You need to read this before you write the report.”

“Is it secret?”

I had to ask because so many things *are* confidential.

“No, it is not secret, but—” Felicyta took a deep breath —“you saw Celia crash. You said you thought the ailerons on her wings did not work. This letter tells why. Celia hit a flying bomb.”

Now that I’m sitting here with this notebook, I don’t know if I should tell the Accident Committee what the mechanic said, because it is exactly the kind of thing they’ll use as an excuse to stop girls from flying Tempests—though I bet any guy would do the same thing, given the chance.

Felicyta wasn’t kidding. The mechanic thinks Celia ran into a V-1 flying bomb. No, not “ran into” it—not accidentally. He thinks she did it on purpose. He thinks she tried to tip a flying bomb out of the sky.

Oh—it is crazy.

When Felicyta told me, over the sad little squares of memorial toast, it made me angry. ATA deaths are never that heroic. An ATA pilot is killed *every week* flying faulty planes, flying in bad weather, coming down on cracked-up runways—there was that terrible accident where the plane skidded and flipped after landing because of the mud, and by the time people got out to the poor pilot, he’d *drowned*—stuck upside down in a cockpit full of standing water. HORRIBLE. But not

heroic. I've never heard of an ATA pilot getting hit by enemy fire. We don't dogfight. Our bomb bays are empty; our gun sights aren't connected to anything. Our deaths don't ever earn us posthumous medals. Drowning in mud, lost at sea, engine failure after takeoff.

So I didn't believe Felicyta at first—she was so convinced by the mechanic's letter, but it felt like she was trying to make Celia's death into a hero's death, when it was just another faulty aircraft.

"Antiaircraft guns on the ground are good for shooting down flying bombs," Felicyta said. "But you know the Royal Air Force Tempest squadron takes down as many flying bombs in the air as the gunners do on the ground, and Celia was in a Tempest—"

"She didn't have any guns," I said. "She wasn't armed." Holy smoke, she didn't even have a radio. She couldn't even tell the radio room what was wrong as she was coming in to land.

"You do not need guns," Felicyta insisted passionately, her eyes blazing. "The mechanic says if you fly fast enough you can ram a pilotless plane with your wingtip."

We leaned our heads in together over the tiny decorated squares of toast, talking in low tones like conspirators.

"I've heard the lads talk about that," Maddie said. "Doodlebug tipping."

"In Polish we call it *taran*—aerial ramming. A Polish pilot rammed a German plane over Warsaw on the first day of the war! The Soviet pilots do it too—same word in Russian. *Taran*. It is the best way to stop a pilotless plane in the air," Felicyta said. "Before it reaches a target, when it is still over sea or open country, not over London or Southampton. That is what the Royal Air Force does with their Tempests."

"But they're armed!" I insisted.

"You do not need to be armed for *taran*," Felicyta said. "You do not need guns to ram another aircraft."

"She's right," Maddie said. "When our lads come up behind a flying bomb and fire at it, they have to fly into the explosion. Absolutely no fun. But if you tip the bomb with your wing before it's over London, it just dives into a field and there's no

mess.”

I just couldn't believe Celia would try such a trick, her first time in a Tempest. But, as we all kept saying, we didn't really know her.

“Would you do it, Maddie?” I asked.

She shook her head slowly. It was more of an *I don't know* than a *no*. Maddie's a very careful pilot and probably has more hours than the rest of us put together. She is the only one of us who is a First Officer. But I realized, just then, that I didn't really know her, either.

“Felicitya would do it,” Maddie said, avoiding an answer. “Wouldn't you, Fliss? You see a flying bomb in the sky ahead of you, and you're flying a Tempest. Would you make a hundred-and-eighty-degree turn and run the other way? Or try to tip it out of the sky?”

“You know what I would do,” Felicitya said, her eyes narrowed. “Don't you believe a woman could make a *taran* as well as a man? You know what I would do, Maddie Brodatt. But I have never met a flying bomb in the air. Have you?”

“Yes,” Maddie said quietly.

We stared at her with wide eyes. I am sure my mouth hung open.

“It was back in June,” she said. “The week after the flying bombs started. I was delivering a Spitfire and I saw it coming toward me, only a couple of hundred feet below me. I thought it was another plane. It *looked* like another plane. But when I waggled my wings it just stayed on course, and then it passed below me—terribly close—and I realized it was a doodlebug. They aren't very big. Horrible things, eyeless, just a bomb with wings.”

Pilotless, I thought. Ugh. “Weren't you scared?”

“Not really—you know how you don't worry about a near miss until later, when you think about it afterward? It was before I'd heard about anybody tipping a doodlebug, and anyway I hadn't a hope of catching it. By the time I'd realized what it was, it was just a speck in the distance, still heading for London. I didn't see it fall.”

I haven't seen one fall, either, but I've heard them. You can

hear them THIRTY MILES away, rattling along. Southampton doesn't get fired on as relentlessly as London and Kent, but we get the miserable things often enough that the noise terrifies me. Like being in the next field over from a big John Deere corn picker: *clackety clackety clackety*. Then the timer counts down, the engine stops, and for a few seconds you don't hear anything as the bomb falls. And then you hear the explosion.

I hate to admit this, but I am so scared of the flying bombs that if I'd known about them ahead of time I would not have come. Even after Uncle Roger's behind-the-scenes scrambling to get the paperwork done for me.

The mechanic says in his letter that he thinks Celia damaged her wing in a separate incident—separate from the crash, “possibly the result of a deliberate brush with another aircraft.” He didn't actually mention flying bombs. But you could tell the idea was in his head.

Now I am upset all over again, remembering the crash. It took me by surprise, watching—I knew something was wrong, of course, but I never expected her to lose control like that, that close to the ground. It happened so suddenly. I'd been waiting for her so we could come back to Hamble together.

I want to talk to Nick about it. He left a message for me—sweet of him, worrying about me having to go to Celia's funeral. It's after nine now, but it's still light out. They have two hours of daylight saving in the summer here—they call it Double Summer Time. So I'll walk down to the phone box in the village and hope Nick's not away on some mission. And that I don't get told off by his landlady for calling so late.

Horrible war. So much more horrible here than back in the States. Every few weeks someone's mother or brother or another friend is killed. And already I am fed up with the shortages, never any butter and never enough sleep. The combination of working so hard, and the constant fear, and just the general *blahness* of everything—I wasn't prepared for it. But how could I possibly, possibly have been prepared for it? They've been living with it for five years. All the time I've been swimming at the Lake, playing girls' varsity basketball and building a tree house for Karl and Kurt like a good big sister, crop dusting with Daddy and helping Mother make applesauce, Maddie's been

delivering fighter planes. When her best friend was killed by a bomb, or whatever it was, eight months ago, I was probably sitting in Mr. Wagner's creative writing class working out rhyme schemes.

It's so strange to be here at last, and so different from what I expected.

I have put my accident report into verse after all. (I think I am trying to trick myself into writing this darn thing.) I wish I'd written this poem earlier. It would have been nice to read it at Celia's service. I will send a copy to her parents.

FOR CELIA FORESTER (by Rose Justice)

The storm will swallow
the brave girl there
who fights destruction
with wings and air—

life and chaos
hover in flight
wingtip to wingtip
until the slight

triumphant moment
when their wings caress
and her crippled Tempest
flies pilotless.

Now that I am an ATA pilot at last, I wish I were a fighter pilot.

August 5, 1944
Hamble, Southampton

And that was the first thing I said to Nick when I got him on the phone. I did get him at last. He wasn't at home, so I rang the airfield, and they said he was on his way but hadn't got there yet, AND he was "busy" tonight, so he might not be able to call back. I was so desperate I waited in the phone box for three quarters of an hour till he got in, and we talked for exactly as long as my cigarette tin of pennies held out. In three weeks he will be off to France, and I will not.

"Hello, Rose darling."

"I want to fly Tempests," I said through clenched teeth. "I want to be operational. I want to be in the Royal Air Force, blasting flying bombs to smithereens."

There was a good penny's worth of silence down the wire before Nick answered. Maybe that's where the saying comes from, *penny for your thoughts*. Speak up or the operator will cut you off.

Finally Nick said sympathetically, "What's made you so bloodthirsty?"

"I'm not bloodthirsty. There's no blood in a pilotless plane, is there! I'm a good pilot. I've probably been flying five years longer than half the boys in 150 Wing. I flew with Daddy from coast to coast across America when I was fifteen, and I did *all* the navigation. *You've* never flown a Tempest, or a Mustang, or a Mark Fourteen Spitfire—I've flown them all, dozens of times. They're wasting me just because I'm a girl! They won't even let us fly to France—they're prepping men for supply and taxi to the front lines, guys with hundreds fewer hours than me, but they're just passing over the women pilots. *It isn't fair.*"

I stopped to breathe. Nick said evenly, "And there's me, worrying you'd be upset by your friend's funeral. Instead you're after shooting down doodlebugs. What's going on, Rose?"

"How do you topple a doodlebug?" I asked. "The girls say you can do it with your wingtip."

Nick laughed. Then he paused. I didn't say anything because I knew he was thinking. "You couldn't," he said at last. "Yes, I've heard that too, but you need to be flying something fast, not a taxi Anson or a Spitfire with only enough fuel to get you to the maintenance airfield. An ATA pilot couldn't topple a V-1 flying bomb."

"Celia did. She tried to, anyway. We think that's why she crashed. How do they do it? Do you just bash it with your wingtip? The Polish pilots have a word for it. *Taran*. Aerial ramming."

Another longish pause. I had stuffed in the entire contents of the cigarette tin right away—after feeding thirty of those gigantic pennies into the telephone it felt like I'd just thrown away a pirate's treasure hoard. At any rate it added up to more than ten minutes. I didn't want to be cut off.

And, of course, the operator was probably listening in. Nick's job is very secret. I didn't want to get him into trouble.

"No," he said at last. "No, for God's sake, don't try that, Rose, you'll kill yourself. Is that what Celia did? Good God Almighty. The idea is not to touch them at all. The doodlebug's a bloody brilliant bomb, but it's not a brilliant aircraft. It's unstable, and if you get your wingtip just beneath the bomb's wing, half a foot or so away from it, you can upset the airflow around its wing and make it stall. But you have to fly fast enough to keep up with it, and it'll still go off when it hits the ground. Promise me you won't try?"

My turn to be silent. Because I couldn't make that promise. I guess I'll never get the chance anyway, but if I did—well, I'm a better pilot than Celia was.

"Rose, darling?" Nick had to prompt me. "I'm not a fighter pilot either. 'They also serve who only stand and wait.'"

Show-off, quoting Milton. He knows I like poetry.

"That's garbage, Nick, and you know it," I said hotly. "You're not standing and waiting. You're dropping off—" I choked back what I was going to say, thinking of the operator listening in. I'm not supposed to know what he's doing, and I *don't* know much about it, but Maddie's boyfriend is in the same squadron—that's how I met Nick—and you figure a little bit out

after a while. They've been flying spies and saboteurs and plastic explosive and machine guns in and out of France for the past two years—secret supplies for the D-Day invasion.

"You're on the front line," I insisted.

There was this long, guilty silence at the other end.

"Oh, you *really are* at the Front," I guessed angrily. "What? They're going to transfer you, aren't they, now that the Front's moved back? Or are they getting the Royal Air Force Special Duties squadron to do ferry work so they can weasel out of sending civilian ATA pilots into Europe?"

"They're moving the squadron," Nick gave me cautiously.

I didn't ask where. He wouldn't have told me anyway.

"Far?"

"Yes."

"Oh."

That means out of the United Kingdom. Maybe the Mediterranean.

"Well..." Nick hesitated. "We've got three days' leave before we go. It's not much time, but it matches up with your next two days off. We could get married."

I am sorry to say that I laughed at him.

I mean, it is just so stupid. He is sweet and funny and kind and brave, and we talk so easily when we are together, and he is so proud to have a pilot for a girlfriend—"Looks like Katharine Hepburn and flies like Amelia Earhart" is how he introduced me to his parents (an exaggeration in both cases, but oh, how I burned with joy and embarrassment when he said it!). But we still haven't ever even been on a real date, dancing or to a film or anything like that—it's always lunch in a pub or a quick cup of tea in the coffee shop at the train station just outside Portsmouth, which is halfway for both of us. It is so *hard* to get time together. Apparently, Maddie has supper with her boyfriend, Jamie, at his air base something like once every two months. And the last time Nick and I had the same day off, I had to stand him up because Uncle Roger and Aunt Edie were taking me out. Of course it never occurred to me to stand up Uncle Roger—but I am in debt to Uncle Roger, I mean morally,

for pulling the strings that got me here. Nick doesn't get that. I know he was hurt.

And now I hurt him again by laughing at his proposal. I tried to make it up to him and promised we would have a whole day, a real day to remember, all to ourselves before he went away.

It makes me angry. *Why* should it have to be like this, for all of us, all our generation? That the only way for a young couple to be together is to get married? No chance of a honeymoon, no flowers or champagne because the gardens are all full of cabbages and turnips and France is a war zone? No pretty silk dress unless someone manages to steal a parachute for you? No. I know I wouldn't get married suddenly even if it weren't wartime. I'd never do it without Daddy there to walk me down the aisle—with nothing more than a telegram to let him know!

It is the same for every young couple. We are all panicking that one of us will be killed next month, next week, tomorrow. All of us panicking that if we don't do it now, we'll never get a chance. Well, I don't care. I'm not letting the war take over my life.

Maddie laughed, too, when I told her about Nick's proposal.

"I know where he got *that* idea," she said. "Jamie and I are getting married on the twelfth of August. Next week!" She gave another hoot of laughter. "That is Nick all over. He's like a puppy. You said no, didn't you, Rosie? The poor lad! Tell you what—you can give him a good excuse and say you've a previous engagement. Come be my bridesmaid."

"What, *me*? Really?"

I was surprised and very pleased, but what a thoughtless thing to say. Her dead friend wasn't going to do it, was she? And all it did was remind her.

Anyway, of course I will.

I asked her if she knew where Nick and Jamie were going to go, and she gave me a funny look.

"Careless talk costs lives," she said.

I do know things I shouldn't. I know a lot about what Uncle

Roger is doing, because Aunt Edie tells me. She's not supposed to know, either. I am a little uncomfortable about it sometimes, but I think they see it as keeping me Ready for Action—Roger always asks for me when he needs to be taxied anywhere. Felicyta thinks it is very funny that this highly important person wants to be piloted by a lowly Third Officer, and a girl at that! He is building pontoons in France at the moment, as the Allies fight their way inland. The next big push will be to cross the Seine. Then Paris.

It's been a week since Celia's accident. I have submitted my report. I didn't draft it on these pretty, gold-edged pages after all, because I didn't have this notebook with me when I wrote it. The day after her funeral I was stuck at RAF Maidsend for a whole day due to lousy weather, and I couldn't go home, because there was a top-priority Tempest (of course) that I had to ferry away for repair as soon as the visibility was good enough to fly. It felt a bit ironic, and spooky, to spend the day writing about Celia's accident and then take off strapped into a broken Tempest. The plane had a big hole punched in the windshield. It was perfectly flyable, but WOW, was it ever windy! Even with goggles on, my face felt like I had frostbite by the time I landed—absolutely frozen. It's true I was going 225 miles per hour at 3500 feet, but you'd never know it was August. It's been such a cold summer.

You have to fly that high to get across Kent because you have to be higher than the barrage balloons they've got tethered there to try to catch the flying bombs.

I can't get over how beautiful the barrage balloons are. I can't even talk about it to anyone—they all think I am crazy. But when you're in the air, and the sky above you is a sea of gray mist and the land below you is all green, the silver balloons float in between like a school of shining silver whales, bobbing a little in the wind. They are as big as buses, and I and every other pilot have a healthy fear of them because their tethering cables are loaded with explosives to try to snarl up enemy aircraft. But they are just magical from above, great big silver bubbles filling the sky.

Incredible. It is just *incredible* that you can notice something like that when your face is so cold you can't feel it anymore,

and you know perfectly well you are surrounded by death, and the only way to stay alive is to endure the howling wind and hold your course. And still the sky is beautiful.

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August 7, 1944

Ladies' Sitting Room, Prestwick Aerodrome, Scotland

I am waiting for Uncle Roger to get out of his meeting. I have decided it is a good idea to take this notebook with me in case I get stuck somewhere again, like last week at Maidsend, so I have something to do. We had a heck of a time getting here—we had to fly through a hailstorm that came out of nowhere. It sounded like we had our heads in a bucket that was being pelted with rocks. I don't know when I've ever been so frightened while flying.

Roger seemed to be all unconcerned. He was in the back, in the middle of a cigarette, with his legs up on the second pilot's seat—the aircraft is a Proctor, not very big. Along with the hail came a bit of wind shear bumping us around, which made him accidentally kick me. I snapped angrily, *"Could you please put your feet down."*

It's amazing what a short, sharp command, instantly obeyed, does for your morale. I was absolutely not going to let him know how worried I was! He didn't stretch out his legs again for the rest of the flight.

After we landed and I was taxiing off the runway, I said, "Sorry about the bumpy ride." When I switched off the engine, he reached over my shoulder and shook my hand.

"You're a damned fine pilot, Rosie," he said. "A real credit to your father. For a moment there I thought we were being hit by machine-gun fire!"

I took a deep breath and let myself clench my fists at last, just to get the tension out of them. Daddy never let me hold tight to the control column; he used to make me control it with one finger just to practice the "light touch." I do it automatically now, but it sure does feel good to squeeze your hands shut after a flight like that. "Is that what machine-gun fire sounds like?" I asked.

"Pretty much! Didn't you notice me looking around wildly for the Messerschmitt that was firing on us? I thought we'd had

it! Ready to go down fighting, though...”

He held up his other hand. He’d got out his *pistol*. Here was me thinking he hadn’t been worried.

“Gee whiz, Uncle Roger, it was just bad weather!”

“And that’s what kills most ATA pilots, right? You kept your head and got us down safely. I always say there’s no other pilot I’d rather have in control of my plane. Except your dad, of course!” He laughed, unstrapped his harness, and put away his pistol. “Ready to take me to France someday soon?”

I unlatched the door. “Uncle Roger, if you can engineer getting me to fly you to France, you really are a Royal Engineer. They haven’t let any ATA pilots go to France yet. And when they do, it’ll be the men.”

Roger gave his characteristic *harrumph* of disgust. “There were American women on the beaches of Normandy four days after D-Day. Army Nurse Corps—plucky girls, carrying all their own gear just like the lads. And our British ladies began to arrive only a few days later. They’re at the Front now, or just behind it. I know you’re ‘civilian pilots,’ but at least in a plane you can scarper home when you’ve dropped me off!”

“You’re preaching to the choir, Uncle Roger!” I hauled myself out onto the wing and reached back in so he could pass me our bags. “If you pull the strings, I’m ready to go.”

I don’t really believe he can pull those strings. But it gives me a warm, excited feeling in the pit of my stomach that he thinks he can, and might actually try.

August 14, 1944

Hamble, Southampton, Hampshire

DOODLEBUG BRIDE / BOMB ALLEY

(Poems by Rose Justice. Not yet written. I just like the titles.)

Maddie had her two days off for her wedding, but I did not, so it was kind of a marathon for me to get to Scotland. I managed to squeeze it in as a series of ferry flights up and took the train back with Maddie. Everyone was as nice as could be, bending over backward to make sure I got the right delivery chits that would take me all the way to Aberdeen and let me stay there overnight. Mostly they were doing it for Maddie. Thank heavens the weather also cooperated. It has been terrible all summer; even the Brits say it's not usually this bad. Great cover for the flying bombs, but no visibility for living pilots, and the ground-to-air gunners can't see what they're shooting at.

It was thick overcast as usual the day after the wedding, when Maddie and I came back on the train together—poor thing, she and Jamie had only one night together. Maddie was in Scotland for two nights, but the night before the wedding doesn't really count, because she and Jamie were still in separate rooms then!

She is marrying into another world. Jamie is the son of an earl and his family lives in an honest-to-goodness Highland castle. Her name has changed from Maddie Brodatt to the Honorable Mrs. Beaufort-Stuart! There are a lot of Beaufort-Stuarts—Jamie is one of six children, though the war is thinning them out. Ugh. His oldest brother was killed in Normandy in June, and his younger sister was killed last year. She is the one who was Maddie's best friend. It was through her that Maddie met Jamie.

I don't know how Lady Beaufort-Stuart copes—I really don't. She has got *eight* refugee children living with her—all boys, evacuated from Glasgow so they won't be bombed. (For

the wedding, they all wore kilts borrowed from the Beaufort-Stuarts.) Before the wedding, this rabble formed a chain across the church door and refused to let anyone in until the bridegroom paid them, which Jamie staunchly refused to do, arguing that if he could kick their soccer ball over the church he was exempt from their entry fee—and he did it, too, amid a huge amount of cheering and yelling. Maddie gave them each a sixpence anyway. Then they tried to carry her into the church, but her grandfather took over at that point and made her walk sedately down the aisle on his arm.

Jamie's family didn't talk much about their dead. They were so happy to have something to celebrate—almost desperate with it. There were flowers and champagne, after all. They have got an amazing rose garden, like the one at the Hotel Hershey, and it hasn't been dug up for vegetables, because they have so much ground that there aren't enough gardeners to take care of it all. So their own garden is where the wedding roses came from. And of course Jamie brought the champagne back with him on one of his clandestine Special Duties trips.

The church they were married in is part of the castle estate, a tiny, crooked building built from local stone. (The boys' ball did not have to go very high to be kicked over the top of it.) Maddie had white heather in her bouquet and pink and yellow damask rosebuds. Jamie was in a kilt, too, the same tartan as the eight kids, and his Royal Air Force tunic; Maddie wore her ATA uniform. (So did I.)

Her grandfather brought a wineglass that had been his mother's in Russia, and Maddie and Jamie used it instead of the traditional Scottish loving cup for the couple's first drink together at the reception afterward. Then they smashed it, on purpose, as per her grandfather's instructions. It was not a Jewish wedding, but Maddie's grandparents are Jewish, and breaking the glass is part of the ceremony.

Lady Beaufort-Stuart was rather shocked that Mr. Brodatt had *wanted* them to break an antique Russian glass that had belonged to his mother, thousands of miles away and a century ago. And he said, "I do not want to wait for Hitler's doodlebugs to get to it first."

Maddie did not throw her bouquet. There would have only

been me to catch it, anyway, and we both knew how I felt about *that*. Instead, she left it below the family's memorial plaque in the church, where her friend's name is carved. The older boy's name is not there yet, but the girl died last year. Her dates were carved there, too. And it was her birthday. They got married on her birthday, August Twelfth.

I like that. Because now they will have a reason to celebrate on that day, a new reason and a good one, instead of being miserable every year.

They didn't mention the dead girl on the day, but Maddie said something about her on the train on our way back. It was when we were admiring Maddie's ring. It is French rose-gold from the nineteenth century, a small, square-cut ruby flanked with little triangles of tiny pearls. It belonged to Jamie's great-grandmother and was handed down the generations eventually to his sister, and now Jamie's family has given it to Maddie.

"I love it fiercely," she said. "Because it is a little bit of Julie as well as Jamie, and of their lovely mother, and I will have it with me always. Fifty years from now, if I live that long, it will be part of me. It is all of ours and they are part of me. And I love that it is French, too—their mother's family is French—they are all fighting for France as much as for Britain. Julie, too—"

Maddie shut up suddenly. But I *got it*, suddenly, and I knew that she'd meant me to get it—her friend died in France. She must have been a spy or a saboteur or something. Maddie is very discreet, but she is closer to that clandestine side of warfare than the other ATA pilots. She does a good bit of specialized taxi flying—like me taking Uncle Roger places, only Maddie's passengers are incognito. I don't ask who they are and I know she wouldn't answer if I did.

Her friend Julie's name is on the family's memorial stone in Scotland, but I know Julie's not buried in that church. Maddie said she didn't get a funeral.

"Do you know how she died?" I asked.

"Oh yes," Maddie answered. "I do. 'Killed in action' means we know for sure. But I've often thought it would be worse if I didn't know. If there hadn't been a fight, the Nazis would have

shipped her off in the dark to a concentration camp and never told anyone—that would have been worse. It doesn't seem possible, but it would have been worse. We would still not know what had happened to her, eight months later, and the war's not over. How long till we'd have found out? Would anyone have *ever* found out?"

I am making myself miserable thinking about it. I started writing in here because I would like to make Maddie a wedding poem. But it is hard when the wedding is in the middle of a war. Maddie is a Doodlebug Bride. Not for the "usual" reasons, not because she and Jamie couldn't hear their own vows over the rattling of approaching bombs, and not because we had to worry about whether she'd be able to run to a shelter in a wedding dress—we'd have worn our uniform slacks if we had worried about it, but the village of Castle Craig is very quiet! No, Maddie is a Doodlebug Bride because she spent part of the afternoon following her wedding day lying on the floor of a London bus hoping she wouldn't get hit by a flying bomb.

London is covered in broken glass. Glass and dust. You can tell where the bombs have fallen by the piles of glass, which get bigger and bigger until you get to a hole in the ground where a house or a store was. More piles of glass are banked against the buildings that are still standing, and there are little paths cleared on the sidewalks. I thought it was bad around Southampton, but London is just a wasteland of wreckage. The trees have all lost their leaves in bomb blasts so that it looks like winter. Houses with no roofs and no windows have signs on the door that read STILL OCCUPIED to stop people from looting them.

The train line down from Scotland to Southampton had been hit, so we got diverted to a different line and had to get off in London and take a bus to Charing Cross Station, where we got on another train to try to go around the damage. The bus had no glass in the windows; they take the glass out on purpose—people would rather sit in the wind than risk windows exploding in their faces. Two V-1 flying bombs went over while we were on the bus, one of them passing close to the rooftops of the buildings. The driver just sped on. Not much else he could do, I guess! Antiaircraft guns were racketing away, too, from

somewhere pretty close by. Every single passenger on the bus, including me and Maddie, dove under the seats and lay there, cowering.

There was a small boy, no more than three years old, just across from me. All the time we were on the floor he was shouting in terror, over and over:

“Not on a bus! Not on a bus! MUMMY MUMMY NOT ON A BUS!”

His mother couldn’t do a thing; she just kept kissing him and kissing him—“Shh, shh.” But he wouldn’t stop and it was more terrible to listen to than the clattering of the bomb as it passed over, terrible to hear such a little kid so frightened and not be able to do anything to make the fear go away. Because the thing he’s afraid of is *real*.

Maddie was *just as bad*. It surprised me—she always seems so confident, and so much older than me. She lay there next to me with her arms clamped over her head, absolutely shaking, and sobbing, too.

When the bomb’s racket cut out, we didn’t know if that was because we couldn’t hear it anymore, or if the guns had got it, or if it was falling on us.

“Count...count now...” the young mother whispered to her kid. “All the way up to thirty and then you’ll be safe....”

I had my arm around Maddie’s shoulders, but she was still cowering with her arms over her head. I looked up at the little boy, with my hair just brushing the grubby underneath of the bus bench. Now I stopped worrying about the stupid bomb and lay there willing this kid to make it up to thirty.

“Twenty-five...twenty-six...twenty-seven...twenty-eight...twenty-nine...”

He got there at last, triumphant.

“Thirty!”

Everybody on the bus burst out clapping.

Then we all got up sheepishly and dusted ourselves off, because nothing had happened and we felt a little foolish lying on the floor while the bus sped through the empty Sunday streets.

Maddie still had her corsage of tartan ribbon and white heather and rosebuds from yesterday pinned on her uniform—actually, it had been part of the ceremony, pinning the family tartan on her. The flowers were very crushed and wilted. As we sat down again, she muttered, “No kiddies for me till after we’ve won the war, I think. Not that it’s likely! We were both out like lights the second we fell into bed. Just so tired all the time, you know? Thirteen days on duty and only two off, Spitfires coming and going as fast as the workshops can spit ’em out.”

I nodded. I’d been so tired I’d slept in my uniform. Well, I’d taken off my hose and tunic, anyway. American slob!

“And Jamie’s away to—well, he’s away now, anyway,” Maddie finished wistfully.

We made it safely to the train at Charing Cross. It is awful going in and out of Charing Cross when you know perfectly well it’s the dead center of London and probably the bull’s-eye the Germans are targeting. But for me the most frightening thing happened after we got off the train at Hamble Station. We were walking along the branch line that takes trains down to the airfield except on Sundays (yes, we were walking back to the airfield on Sunday evening, because technically I was working that day and it would still be light for another five hours), and there were a couple of kids leaning over the wall by the tracks and yelling. They straightened up guiltily when they noticed us, but their pal who’d scaled the wall to get to the other side of the tracks didn’t realize we were there and gave himself away by shouting to his friends.

“Oi, you lot—I’ve got another bit, but I need Rob’s knife back to cut these wires!”

The kids froze. We probably looked scarily official in our uniforms, especially Maddie with her First Officer’s gold stripes. The boys took a couple of steps back. One of them leaned over the wall and tried to shush his pal. And that made me look over the side of the wall to see what the other boy was doing.

He was taking apart a bomb.

Scout’s honor, that’s what he was doing. It was a flying bomb that hadn’t gone off. Sometimes the bombs run out of fuel

prematurely and just glide down, and occasionally they just don't go off. It was much smaller than a Tempest or even a Spitfire, really nothing more than a bomb with wings. It had taken a couple of saplings down as it plowed into the strip of waste ground at the edge of the railway, and now it was sitting on its belly by the train tracks, one wing missing and a long strip of the fuselage ripped open where it had connected with the trees. All of its innards were lying exposed to view and ready for small boys to come along and mop up souvenirs.

It must have just happened, or the railway would have already called the unexploded-bomb people out to deal with it. The scavenging boy who wanted Rob's knife back was standing there with a shiny cylindrical metal case in his hand. It looked like a soup tin with the paper label missing. And like he'd said, it was attached by a couple of wires to the inside of the bomb.

"I've got the fuse!" the boy yelled triumphantly, and then he saw me and Maddie staring at him with our mouths open.

The kid glanced around; there was no place to hide. He reached toward the wires inside the plane as if he was about to yank them free.

Maddie dropped her suitcase and tried to scramble over the wall. "*Don't pull! Don't move! Just hold still—*"

I beat her to it. I didn't have a case, just my flight bag over my shoulder.

"*Don't drop it—*"

Maddie was yelling at me now. "Get him to put it down *gently*! There's an electrical charge in the fuse and some of them are timed to go off *after* they've landed!" She made it over the wall and was three steps behind me as we raced across the tracks. "That fuse could *blow your fingers off on its own*, you daft lad, even without being attached to a ton of explosive!"

Then the boy stood very still. He didn't drop the fuse. He held it out to me across both palms. I remember thinking that this was hugely unfair of God and the universe in general, because now I had to take the fuse. I had got there first and it was mine.

For a moment we were stuck like that, a little boy and a big girl, holding the living heart of a V-1 flying bomb between us.

The silver cylinder had a type number stamped on the cap and a manufacturer's name: RHEINMETALL.

Incredible, to think that someone else's fingers had fit this destructive thing together, inserted the fragile switches and connected the wires and screwed on the cap, and now it was balanced, ready to blow my own fingers off. Or this boy's.

I took it from him very carefully.

"Now scoot," I said sadly, because I really thought I was as good as dead.

As he handed it over, the wires simply fell free. Probably they had been disconnected the whole time. At least if the fuse went off it wasn't going to take the bomb with it.

"Get out of here!" I yelled at the boy.

He hurtled back across the tracks. As for me, my body acted on behalf of my frozen brain. I wound up for a pitch and hurled the fuse away from the bomb, away from the railway, into the scrubby, thin woodland along the tracks.

It hit a beech sapling with a small crack and bang. Bits of bark exploded around the tree, and the trunk sagged—it bent right in half as though it had been caught in a tornado. It wasn't a very big explosion. But we all saw it. Maddie crouched next to the wreckage of the bomb with her arms over her head, like she'd done in the bus.

I said to her, "Come on, Maddie. Get away."

I tugged her across the tracks and over the stone wall. Wouldn't you know it, I tore my skirt going back over the wall when everything was safe again and not when I was racing to save a kid from blowing himself up! And unbelievably—or very believably, I guess, as my ten years' experience of being a big sister to those hooligan twins, Karl and Kurt, ought to have taught me by now—the three boys were still standing there rooted to the spot, staring at the destruction with wide, excited eyes.

"Would that have gone off in my hand, miss?"

"How do I know? Maybe! Come on, you've got to let the authorities know what you've found. Come down to the airfield with us and make a real report. Get going!"

Maddie pulled herself together and began to herd the boys along the road. "Go, go, go!"

The kids let themselves be bullied now, eyeing me respectfully. "You don't throw like a girl," one of them commented.

"That's 'cause I played softball at school. Like baseball. Or cricket, sort of—none of us 'throw like girls.'"

"You a Yank?" asked the boy who'd extracted the fuse, pointing to my USA sleeve patch.

"Obviously."

"You proud of it?"

Smart aleck.

I had to think about the answer to this question.

"Yes," I said after a moment. "Yeah, I am."

"That bomb's dead now, right, miss? A dead doodlebug..." The boys all snickered. "That's what the UXB teams do—they take out the fuse..."

I hesitated. I don't know a lot about bombs. Maddie said, "Listen, that dead doodlebug's still full of TNT, and if that fuse had gone off *inside* the aircraft, it would have blown you up and probably the rest of us, too. What were you doing, playing UXB team?"

"We saw it come down!" one of them explained eagerly, and they all broke into grins. "We heard it first and came running up to the station bridge to watch—Rob had his dad's field glasses—"

(Crazy kids.)

"—And we realized it was heading *straight for us*, and we lay right down on the road next to the wall till the noise stopped, because we thought we were dead for sure!"

They were all still completely white around the gills, but they were *enjoying* themselves more than anything else. Ten-year-old boys are *crazy*.

We escorted them to the airfield and called out the local Air Raid Precautions warden. He was really nice to the kids and took them along with him to watch from a safe distance as the road and railway were closed off in preparation for the UXB

squad to come along and work their magic.

“Does your uncle Roger ever have to deal with unexploded bombs?” Maddie asked as we watched them go. “Isn’t he in the Royal Engineers, too, like the bomb squads?”

I never thought about it. I just assumed that all he did was build bridges and dig trenches. Or tell people to do it, anyway. I think of Uncle Roger as having a “safe” job.

I got back to the airfield at Hamble in time to pick up the last delivery chit for that evening, a new Spitfire to be delivered to Chattis Hill for testing. It’s only a twenty-minute flight there, but it took me a couple of hours to get back—no more trains, and of course, since I was the last flight of the day, there weren’t any other ferry pilots heading home for me to tag along with. By ten p.m. the best offer I’d had was from a canteen dishwasher who said I could borrow her bicycle if I brought it back before lunchtime the next day, and I had to bribe her with today’s chocolate bar (you get a bar of Cadbury’s milk chocolate with every completed ferry flight). I’d already handed it over when a fireman who was going off duty took pity on me and offered me a lift on his motorcycle.

By the time I got home, I was absolutely whacked. It was eleven o’clock and I was hungry enough to wolf down one of Mrs. Hatch’s awful Spam stews (she assures me the veg in it is cabbage and not nettle). Late as it was, she’d very kindly reheated it for me. I fell into bed and thought briefly of Maddie and Jamie, newlyweds too tired to make love, and then I fell asleep, too.

I dreamed about the Rheinmetall fuse. I dreamed it detonated in the boy’s hands and blew his fingers off.

It was so vivid—like seeing a moving picture shot in close-up. All I could see were the boy’s hands, palms spread with the silver cylinder lying across them, smooth, round fingertips sticking out just beneath the shining metal, then all of it flying apart. I woke up gasping.

I am spooked by the image. I can’t get it out of my head. I was hoping I could forget it by writing about the wedding—I started out to do a poem, didn’t I? And all I’ve done is write about buzz bombs. I just learned that the TNT mix they use in

them is called amatol. It is a good word, if a bad thing. Perhaps I should try writing poetry about bombs.

Silver tube of fuse and hollow
Cylinder of detonator
Cap and gyro

Blah. It would be good if my heart were in it—like Edna St. Vincent Millay’s “Counting-out Rhyme.” But I don’t want to think about it. Small, smooth fingers blown to bloody bone.

I am determined to do that wedding poem for Maddie. I am afraid it will be inevitably bomb-themed, but I have an idea.

WARTIME WEDDING

(by Rose Justice. I think this poem is too serious to call it “Doodlebug Bride.”)

In a storm of cocktail ice
their silver plane is tossed
from a silver bowl of sky
to a runway rimmed with frost.
The summer evening’s long and cold,
the ground crew shovels snow like glass.
Under their feet the crunching hail
breaks frozen blades of grass.

The house without a roof
seventh along the row
has shed its windowpanes like tears
over the street below.
A woman shovels glass like snow
from the sidewalk as they pass,
under their feet a mirrored hell
of bomb-strewn broken glass.

The dead beloved names
march down the gray and cold
walls of the little church.
He gives her the warm gold.
The loving cup is shared,
the crystal goblet smashed.
Their brave, determined, joyful heels
dance in the broken glass.

It is so hard trying to say what you mean. Of course Maddie and Jamie don't fly together—I don't know if they've *ever* flown together—and I'm pretty sure they haven't been for a walk in London together since the buzz bombs started. But it's meant to be metaphoric. It never quite comes out the way you want it to, and you always feel it is a little petty to write such floaty stuff about such serious things.

I am going to slam this notebook shut and see if I can raise Nick again on the telephone to plan our Big Date.

August 17, 1944

Hamble

Nick is gone.

We had a wonderful afternoon—he came here and we borrowed the Hatches' canoe and took it down the Hamble, out into Southampton Water. He brought a bottle of champagne along, booty from one of his secret trips to France, and we drank it on the water. We sort of grazed instead of actually stopping for a picnic—it made the Spam sandwiches seem more romantic. We sang camp songs and taught each other rounds. Mine was,

*“My paddle’s keen and bright,
Flashing with silver,
Follow the wild goose flight,
Dip, dip, and swing.*

*“Dip, dip, and swing her back,
Flashing with silver,
Swift as the wild goose flies,
Dip, dip, and swing.”*

Nick's round was,

*“Rose, Rose, Rose, Rose,
Will I ever see thee wed?
I will marry at thy will, sir,
At thy will.”*

I refused to sing it until I made him promise it was not a binding contract!

I was in the stern, steering, because he had never been in a canoe. He was a bit of a pill about me being in control—he

would *not* take orders from me at first and kept trying to stand up when he wanted to point things out, or to climb back to get to the hamper. He can't swim. I really didn't want to have to drag him out of Southampton Water before I kissed him good-bye and sent him off to wherever. Why are boys always so sure they're right about everything?

But I'm not complaining. Because it was *so nice*. I don't think I'd have been brave enough to go out into Southampton Water except I knew that Mrs. Hatch's daughter Minna had taken her mother out there a couple of weeks before D-Day, when the harbor was PACKED with battleships and landing craft, and they got away with it. We did, too. Only one person even bothered to ask what we were up to—everyone else just waved and laughed. I guess the picnic hamper and the bottle of champagne were appropriate nonspy accessories. Nick was wearing his RAF blues and I had on a flowery summer top I'd borrowed from Felicyta, and we were clearly on a date.

The one character who did call out to us was a patrolman on a motor launch. It seemed to take about ten minutes for him to putter across to us—exaggeratedly slow once he'd got us in his sights. I had to back-paddle like crazy to stay in the same place. He played Twenty Questions for a while and told us that the Rules of the Road did not apply to hand-powered pleasure craft in wartime (or something like that), and no one on maneuvers would give way to us, so we'd better stay out of the way.

Then he tipped his cap to me and told us to enjoy ourselves. The innocent American broad act is always a sure winner for getting out of trouble!

It was actually hard work paddling in Southampton Water, and I didn't need the Coast Guard's warning to stay out of the way of the shot-up aircraft carrier that came looming toward the maintenance docks behind a pair of tugboats—even without power it made a wake that tossed us around as if we were on the open sea.

On our way back, a trio of Spitfires tore out to sea in formation over our heads—probably just a test flight from Chattis Hill, since most of the squadrons around Southampton have all moved to France by now. But the noise was

tremendous, echoing on the water. We were working hard to get back upstream, and we didn't dare stop paddling—breathless, arms aching with effort, necks aching, too, because we couldn't look away from the planes in the sky.

It was such an *adventure* of a date!

Oh, I like Nick—and I'll miss him. He makes me feel so pretty and clever, playing with my hair while he gets me to test him on wind-direction calculations. He is funny and earnest, a bit puppylike, but game, you know? Ready to do nutty things like try canoeing among the battleships. First time in a canoe.

I wanted to write something for him, to send him off with, but it hasn't come out as a true-love sonnet. I am always too ambitious, and also I just can't seem to write about ANYTHING but the darned doodlebugs. I guess I won't show it to him.

SONG OF THE MODERN WARRIOR

(by Rose Justice)

My paddle's keen and bright,
flashing with silver,
swift as the Spitfire's flight—
dip, dip, and swing.

Dip, dip, and swing her back,
flashing with silver,
follow the V-1's track,
dip, dip her wing.

Scour her fuselage,
strip back her paintwork,
pare off her fittings
to keep down her weight,
polish the plane
till she's slicker than silver,
slicing the sky
with her propeller's blade.

Smooth as the water's face,
cannon fire flaming,
follow the V-1's trace,
dip, dip her wing.

My paddle's keen and bright,
flashing with silver—
follow the Spitfire's flight,
dip, dip and swing.

I guess the influence of *Make Bright the Arrows* is pretty obvious. I don't think I'm as warlike as Edna St. Vincent Millay, but she has a lot to answer for as far as Rose Justice, Poet, is concerned—urging me off to Europe! I am a little blue. No more champagne to look forward to now that Nick's squadron is gone—nothing but Spam sandwiches for the foreseeable future. Oh well—back to work tomorrow.

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August 19, 1944

I had that dream about the exploding fuse again—only this time it was Karl who had picked it up and was holding it out to Kurt. GOD.

I bawled so loudly that Mrs. Hatch came in to wake me up and made me come downstairs and have a cup of tea. And I am pretty sure that she telephoned Aunt Edie about it because when I got to the airfield, along with my ferry chit there was a note saying that I'd been invited to have lunch with her in London on my next day off.

Wonderful Aunt Edie! I am looking forward to it.

OceanofPDF.com

August 24, 1944

Hamble

Wonderful Aunt Edie and wonderful Uncle Roger!

Uncle Roger has sent me a fuse. What a completely goofy family I have. Concerned, but goofy. When I called Edie to arrange our lunch date, she asked me about the exploding-fuse dreams, and I told her about the boys dismantling the bomb by the train tracks, and she must have told Uncle Roger—and his solution to my bad dreams is to send me a fuse from a German bomb. In pieces, with a timing device that attaches to the bottom to delay its going off. It is not a doodlebug fuse but a “Type 17 from a 250 kg UXB” that someone successfully took apart without exploding himself a couple of years ago, and Uncle Roger sent it with a diagram and note explaining how “demystification” stops you from being afraid of something—I guess the idea is that if you know how something works, it becomes less menacing. Like me taking my friends from school flying so they’ll stop being scared of it.

It was such a weird thing to have delivered to me at the airfield, and I had to show it off. *Everyone* was interested. Of course nobody had ever seen one, and I very much doubt it is legal for me to have it. Felicyta naturally wanted to know where Roger had got it, which I couldn’t answer. Maddie had to take it apart and put it back together about ten times. She is a mechanical nut. Felicyta didn’t say anything for a long time; she just sat watching Maddie poking at electrical relays. (I was watching her, too, watching her small, quick fingers with the French gold and wine-red ruby glittering there, and I thought grimly: Now I’m going to dream it’s *Maddie’s* hands exploding.)

Suddenly Felicyta’s face shriveled in a look of hatred and she said viciously, “I wonder if we could reload it.” Her heart is in Warsaw, battling for her country with the Polish Resistance.

“And drop it back on the factory where it came from,” I improved.

Felicyta and Maddie gave me awkward, pitying looks. *Ignorant American Schoolgirl* is what those looks said.

“My sister is at work in a German munitions factory,” Felicyta said coolly. “And my mother. ‘Political prisoners.’ That is German for ‘slave labor.’ They are in a concentration camp.”

The embarrassing thing is, I already knew this, or sort of. But of course I hadn’t really put it together. Anyway, being an Ignorant American Schoolgirl gives me an open ticket to ask brazen, awkward questions, and I’d already put my foot in my mouth, so I just went on.

“What is a concentration camp, Fliss?”

She shrugged. “A prison for civilians—for anyone the Germans don’t like. Poles because they are Poles, Jews because they are Jews. My mother because she gave a blanket to a Jew. My sister because she told the German police my mother was right to do it. People disappear all the time, and you never hear from them again.”

“But how do you know where your family is?”

Felicyta kept her voice steady, her face still wearing an expression of patient tolerance for ignorant foreigners. “Two years ago my father got a postcard from a cousin in the same camp who was allowed to ask him to send her a food package, and she told him she had seen my mother and sister alive.”

How utterly impossible it is for me to imagine—Felicyta’s mother and sister have been missing for *two years*. That was what Maddie was talking about on the train. She thought it was worse than being told someone was dead—*not ever knowing* what happened to them.

You can see why Felicyta is so angry at everything.

“Fliss, how did *you* escape?”

She smiled a close-lipped, evil smile, only the corners of her mouth turning up, and said, “I stole a plane. Okay, it was my own plane, but I did have to steal it! I was doing courier work for the Polish Air Force when the Germans invaded. I knew they would take over all communications aircraft, or destroy them, so I took this one myself. I flew to France. It took me three days, mostly flying in twilight, hiding the plane in woodland by day. France was still free then....”

It must have been in 1939. I was thirteen. I was in junior high school. I was *oblivious* to what was going on in Europe. Or

anywhere except right where I was—Justice Field, Mount Jericho, PA, the center of the known universe.

Here is what I already knew about Felicyta's sister—what I'd forgotten about hearing before. It happened just after I came to Hamble. I was sitting in the Operations room with a few other girls, waiting for the day's ferry chits to be handed out. I was new enough to be shy and a little bit nervous about sitting down next to people I didn't know, so I was sitting by myself—it was even before Celia had turned up.

The wireless was on, and because I wasn't talking to anybody, I was listening to the radio. And it was this ugly story about a prison camp in Germany where they'd been running medical experiments on Polish prisoners, all women, mostly students—cutting open their legs and infecting them with gangrene, simulating bullet wounds, in the name of “medical science”—to find treatments for German soldiers wounded on the Eastern Front. The BBC announcer read through an endless list of names that a former prisoner had secretly memorized when she knew she was going to be released. I was interested because the woman who'd memorized the names was an American citizen. It was compelling stuff—you couldn't stop listening—but it was so absolutely awful that I couldn't believe it, and I said so.

“That's got to be propaganda!” I burst out. “You English are as bad as the Germans!”

“You should read the *Guardian*,” Maddie said. “It's not all propaganda. The reports from the concentration camps are pure evil.”

“Poisoning girls with gangrene?” I objected. “It's like trying to get us to believe the Germans eat babies!”

At that point Felicyta slammed her teacup down so hard she broke her saucer right in half and stormed out of the room. The floor shuddered as the door thundered shut behind her.

Maddie thrashed her newspaper into submission and nodded toward Felicyta's slammed door.

“Her sister's in a German concentration camp,” Maddie explained in a level voice. She looked back down at the paper without meeting my eyes. “Felicyta thinks the Germans *do* eat

babies.”

That was three months ago.

I am starting to understand why the Polish pilots are so fanatical about their hatred of the Germans. Thank goodness I haven't got a “good old Pennsylvania Dutch” name like Stolfuss or Hitz or Zimmerman. Felicyta doesn't know my middle name is Moyer, Mother's maiden name, or that my grandfather still speaks old-fashioned Pennsylvania German sometimes. I will never tell her.

I can't believe I have only been in England for three months—it seems like forever. And yet the war hasn't really touched me. I haven't lost my fiancé or my best friend or my mother or my sister. I'm not in exile. I have a home to go back to and people waiting for me. I have an aunt who is going to take me to lunch at the Ritz and an uncle who sends me fuses!

But I am very glad that Kurt and Karl are only ten years old, far too young to be drafted, and that they are safe at home in Pennsylvania.

August 25, 1944

Hamble

Felicyta and Maddie came over to play cards with me at the Hatches' last night, and there was an air raid. The siren doesn't scare me at all when it first goes off—it sounds *exactly* like the hooter at the Volunteer Fire Company in Conewago Grove. I always think, "That'll be a fire somewhere—I'm glad Daddy's not on duty here." Mrs. Hatch shooed us out through the vegetable garden to get to the shelter. The house is on a high slope, and as we stumbled over the cabbages in the dark, we got a frightening glimpse of half a dozen flying bombs traveling across the sky. All you could see were the red exhaust flames of their engines—from far away it looked like a line of glowing balls of fire moving slowly along the horizon.

There is only room for one camp bed in the Hatches' shelter because they built the shelter themselves and it is tiny. The camp bed is ridiculously covered with a candlewick bedspread to make it seem cozy, and we all squeezed together on it to stay out of the mud. Fliss said to me, "Singing will not scare the bombs away!"

I'd been humming nervously without realizing I was doing it. I laughed. "It's a Girl Scout camp song."

"Rosie is *always* singing," Maddie pointed out. I could feel her trembling next to me, and remembered how much she hates the bombs.

"Sing properly if you're going to sing!" commanded Mrs. Hatch. "Then we can all join in."

So we sat in the underground shelter and I taught them camp songs. I sang "Land of the Silver Birch" and "My Paddle's Keen and Bright" (again), and then I got bold and sang my "Modern Warrior" poem to the same tune, and they beat time by clapping. And then I taught them "Make New Friends." It's easy, and we sang it as a round, again and again—

"Make new friends

*But keep the old,
One is silver
And the other gold!"*

Kind of corny but it seemed so appropriate.

There we were in the mud, singing so loudly that we didn't hear the "all clear" siren when it went! And Mr. Hatch came home and broke up the party, hustling us all inside and tut-tutting about his wife being so easily corrupted by modern youth.

"You might have *at least* been singing *hymns*," he chided her.

It was the best air raid ever.

Back in bed, I started thinking about how I like to be in a crowd—it's not like being best friends, or even a threesome, where sometimes two of you pair up and leave the other out. There's always someone on your side when you're in a crowd.

*"Make new friends
But keep the old...."*

And then I started thinking about my combination birthday/Halloween party last year at our cottage in Conewago Grove, with Polly and Alice and Sandy and Fran—we all dressed up as the characters from *The Wizard of Oz*, with Polly as Toto, and told ghost stories on the sleeping porch by the light of jack-o'-lanterns. And now we have all graduated or gone to war (me) or married (Polly) or whatever, and we will never again be the team that won the Jericho County Girls' Basketball Championship or even play together, probably.

It was the stupid candlewick bedspread's fault! Mrs. Hatch's bedspreads *feel* the same as the ones Mother has out on the sleeping porch. Anyway, I had the candlewick on my bed pulled up to my chin last night, and after I thought about the house party, I started thinking about the sleeping porch—the thump and patter of squirrels running across the roof, the way the canvas awnings creak and flap, a trapped firefly blinking against the screen, the way the whole room shakes whenever

anybody runs water in the bathroom on the other side of the wall—

I got so homesick I began to cry. I just couldn't stop thinking about the sleeping porch!

It's funny what sets you off. You miss people the most—really it is Polly and Alice and Sandy and Fran whom I am lonely for—but it is the candlewick bedspread that makes me ache with longing to be home.

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September 1, 1944

Hamble

Paris is free! It's been a nerve-racking couple of weeks, watching the Allied forces inching along. We have a map we stick pins in to track the front lines. During the fighting in Paris, there was no radio communication coming out of the city at ALL—nothing but rumors. The papers said the city was liberated and all the church bells in London were ringing to celebrate, and the next day the papers said, “Whoops, not yet!” It wasn't long before the real news came through, but it was like being on a roller coaster waiting for it. Now the fighting is moving across the Seine and into Belgium.

The problem is that it's getting harder and harder to get supplies to the front lines because the Germans are still hanging on to the ports at Calais, Le Havre, Boulogne, etc. They realize what a pain in the neck it is for the Allied forces to have to ferry fuel, food, spare parts, blood, bandages, and everything else across to Normandy and then truck it two hundred miles north up this corridor between Germany and the French coast—especially with the train lines and bridges all blown up after the fighting (that is where Uncle Roger comes in, getting them to rig up temporary bridges in a hurry).

You can't even fly directly into France without being shot at, and you certainly can't unload a cargo ship. Le Havre is under siege. It is being pounded. We are doing it *ourselves*. The harbor there is taking such a beating that it will have to be rebuilt before it's any use to us.

I had my lunch with Aunt Edie in the Palm Court at the Ritz yesterday. Wow. It makes the Hotel Hershey look pretty bush league, which isn't exactly fair. Thank goodness for my uniform—I don't have anything else to wear that would have been remotely suitable, but in uniform you don't ever have to dress up for anything! I wore the same clothes I wore to Maddie's wedding (in fact I wore my other tunic, because the one I wore to Maddie's wedding is not as sharp-looking as it used to be, due to flying bombs and bus floors). But you never

feel out of place or underdressed in uniform.

Edie, of course, was very elegant. I don't think she's had any new clothes for a while, either, but she gets everything remade by her own tailor and she is always so stylish—she kissed me on both cheeks to greet me and looked sort of slant-eyed at my hands because I wasn't wearing gloves (they did *not* survive the doodlebug wedding adventure).

We didn't talk about French cities being liberated—Edie will not discuss bloodshed and bombing while she is presiding over white linen and silver in the Palm Court at the Ritz! I told her about my last date with Nick.

"I like your Nick," she commented when I'd finished. "So terribly earnest."

I laughed. "That's exactly the word I think of, too. Did I tell you he proposed to me? He wanted to get married before he got sent off to wherever he is now. I know everyone is doing it, and I hated to disappoint him, but—"

"But it's not a charm. He won't be any better protected if you're married to him, and if you're really going to choose a boy yourself and you're being sensible about what you do together, there's no good reason to rush into marriage. You did the right thing, Rose darling."

"But I do worry about him," I said. "And if we were married, of course they would tell me right away if anything happened to him. They won't do that for just friends."

"There's something to be said for not being told right away," Aunt Edie mused. "But I prefer simply not to worry. I never worry about Roger. Do you worry about General Montgomery—or General Eisenhower? They're just as likely to be killed as anybody, but you don't think about it. Imagine Nick a general!"

And we both laughed this time.

"Of course, Roger's just as likely to perish of a heart attack, or flu. Or some nasty disease he picks up in the field. Oh—that reminds me, Rose. He wanted to know if your jabs are up to date."

That drew a blank with me.

"My jabs?"

“Your inoculations. Tetanus and typhoid, principally.”

“Oh! We call them shots. Yes, I had boosters this spring, before I came to England. Why?”

“Can’t say,” Aunt Edie said coyly, folding her napkin in her lap. “Shall we have coffee instead of tea? I hear they have a supply of the real thing from the Americans this week.”

“Oh, wonderful Aunt Edie!”

My fingers are crossed because I know they are inoculating other ferry pilots so they will be ready to fly to Europe. But I’m not holding my breath, because so far none of them have been girls. And to tell the truth, I am less enthusiastic about the idea of doing ferry work in Europe than I was. Because it all looks so horribly, horribly *ruined*. The pictures in the papers are unbelievably awful—it looks like earthquake damage. Whole streets are knocked down, and the soldiers have to pick their way over rubble to get through the towns—I think I said before that it’s WE who are doing the bombing. Allied planes are dropping thousands of tons of TNT day and night on our own cities. And on German cities, too, of course.

I am going to confess something here that I can’t quite bring myself to confess to anyone aloud, and this is what it is. I am scared of the way the Germans are refusing to let go of anything. I am scared of the way they are clinging to the French and Belgian ports, even though they’ve been pushed out of most of the rest of France. There is something about it that spooks me. They’ve lost. They must know they’ve lost—that they’re on the run. It’s all so pointless. It shouldn’t take another year. But I bet it will.

It’s not desperation—there is something inhuman in it. That is what I find so creepy. Five years of destruction and mayhem, lives lost everywhere, shortages of food and fuel and clothing—and the insane mind behind it just urges us *all* on and on to more destruction. And we all keep playing.

September 7, 1944

Hamble

Now Brussels is free, but more important, Antwerp, too—a port in Allied hands at last! But actually the best news as far as I'm concerned was in the *Manchester Guardian* yesterday, read aloud by our *Guardian* addict, the Honorable Mrs. Maddie Beaufort-Stuart, while we were waiting for our delivery chits. Here's the news: RAF pilots are reporting that they can now fly the whole way across France without running into enemy aircraft!

It has been quieter here, too. As we've been gaining ground in France and Belgium, the launch sites for the V-1 flying bombs are being taken out of action or pushed back—the doodlebugs can't reach as far into England now, and also there aren't as many of them. You really notice it here in Southampton because there just hasn't been *anything* for about ten days. It's quieter in Kent and London, too. THANK GOD.

Operations told us to look out for flying bombs launched from planes—from German bombers. We've had the flash cards out to familiarize ourselves with the silhouette of a Heinkel He-111, just in case. They will probably aim for Paris and Brussels, not London, but they are not licked yet.

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September 11, 1944

Camp Los Angeles, Reims, FRANCE!

I am in France!

I am staying overnight with the American nurses in the Red Cross unit at one of the redeployment camps near Reims, full of GIs on their way to battle. Roger moves on to his own forces near Antwerp tomorrow. They call this place Camp LA, which is short for Camp Los Angeles—all the camps around here are named after some American metropolis, to make the boys feel at home, I guess. No one is fooled. It is an instant city—just add water! (Of which there is plenty, most of it underfoot.) Reims was liberated on August 30, and Camp LA has not been here for much more than a week, but it is huge. There is a grocery store and a cinema as well as the hospital and mess halls, all in tents.

The store is stocked with American loot that seems miraculous to me—Quaker oats and Ivory soap and Hershey bars. Nothing makes me feel at home like Hershey's chocolate! Back at Justice Field, you get the chocolate factory lined up on your starboard wingtip when you're coming in to land, and when the wind's from the northwest, the whole valley smells like roasting cocoa beans.

It doesn't smell like cocoa here. Most of the open space in Camp LA is an ocean of mud, except the freshly surfaced runway. It's been a beautiful clear day for once, and I had no encounters with other aircraft on our way here, although it was sobering to see the utter destruction of Caen as we crossed the coast and the clouds of smoke rising over Le Havre in the north.

When Uncle Roger gets things moving, he moves *fast*. I think that's partly to make sure no one ever has time to say no to him. Here's what happened this morning: I got an "S" chit when I went into Operations at Hamble, which means "Secret"—I'm not supposed to tell anyone who I'm ferrying or where I collected them. I won't write down any of that. Also—this isn't secret—I was supposed to make sure I had my US passport with me as well as my ATA authorization card and pilot's license, and Operations told me to go home and change

to full dress uniform with skirt (not slacks)—which usually means you will be taxiing someone important. Only in this case it just meant they didn't know who I'd be taxiing and I ought to be presentable in case I ran into General Patton after I arrived!

Operations *didn't* tell me I was going overnight, so I haven't got anything like a toothbrush or pajamas with me. But it is only for one night and the other girls are having to wash their faces in their helmets, and had to sleep in their ambulances on the way here from Normandy before the tents got set up, so I guess I can spend another night in my clothes. Roger bought me a toothbrush in the grocery store along with a month's supply of chocolate and gum. I am going to be everybody's best friend when I get back to Southampton.

I flew an Oxford to get here, carrying Roger and a handful of other passengers. I felt like the whole sky belonged to me. The Seine was with us all the way through France, great big loops of shining silver out the port side, and I'd already had to shout at my passengers to take turns looking because they were throwing me out of balance by crowding on one side of the plane, and then there it was ahead of me—PARIS, FRANCE.

It was a huge, gorgeous sprawl of wooded parks and broad avenues, and although we flew over some bomb damage in the suburbs, the closer we got to the middle, the more and more beautiful it was, and from the air, it didn't look the least bit damaged. Everybody was glued to the tiny windows, and as we got closer, they stopped trying to crowd at the same side because the city was all around us. I went down to about 700 feet, and it was like flying over a model railway village, with the gleaming white domes of Sacré Coeur presiding over it all and Notre Dame Cathedral like a wedding cake right in the middle. Of course it is the first time I've ever seen Paris, and what a way to see it for the first time, flying low over streets full of flags and red-white-and-blue bunting!

By the time we were over Notre Dame I was singing to myself again. The cabin was so noisy I thought no one would be able to hear me. But Uncle Roger and someone else were crouched right behind me looking over my shoulders because there is a better view from the cockpit than in the back, and they heard me. And then everybody joined in.

*“Allons enfants de la Patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé!”*

I don't know why I know all the words to the French national anthem. I am just like that. I never forget the words to anything! We learned it in eighth grade, when we were just starting to take French.

If Roger and the others hadn't all joined in, I'd have probably ended up in tears—overcome with emotion. As it was, everybody was too noisy and excited for me to get to feeling sentimental. We were *shouting* as I detoured east along the Seine toward the Eiffel Tower, most of my passengers just going “Da Da Da DAH!” since I was the only one who knew all the words.

As we got closer to the Eiffel Tower, one of the wags in the back yelled, “Go under it!”

I did not fly under the Eiffel Tower!

But I bet if I'd been flying a fighter plane, something small and zippy, I'd have been tempted. Maybe tomorrow? No, I won't be that stupid. But the thought that it's even a possibility makes me warm and happy.

So I didn't fly under the Eiffel Tower, but I did fly in big, lazy circles around it while everybody pointed and cheered and somebody snapped a million pictures over my shoulder like a sightseer. At that point I'd stopped singing because I was really too low and I had to concentrate on flying.

I'm BUZZING THE EIFFEL TOWER, I thought. JUST WAIT till I tell Daddy I've buzzed the Eiffel Tower!

It is *the most wonderful thing I have ever done*.

The rest of the day has brought me back to earth with a wallop because after I landed and had my camp tour and went shopping, the nurses I am staying with put me to work in an “outpatient” clinic tent of the field hospital—walking wounded only, thank goodness. I was assisting, holding equipment, and cutting gauze for bandages, not actually changing dressings myself. To tell the truth, I think they just grabbed the opportunity to use me as a morale booster.

“From *Pennsylvania!* A *pilot!* Shouldn't you be in *school*, young lady? Look at those *curls!*”

It reminded me of when Maddie and Celia and Felicyta and I handed out the strawberries to the soldiers on D-Day—except these men weren't as frightened. They'd already been to battle and it's hardened them, or at least made them better at hiding that they're scared. It makes my heart ache, thinking that none of these brave boys are so badly hurt they won't be fighting again in a couple of weeks. I don't want them to be badly hurt, but equally I don't want them to be killed on the front lines. I have got "Battle Hymn of the Republic" stuck in my brain.
Glory, glory Hallelujah!

It is why I am up so late—I have been working on a poem in my head all day, and I want to write it down in case I forget it.

BATTLE HYMN OF 1944 (by Rose Justice)

O let them struggle wisely, these brave boys
and girls around the watch fires; grant they should
fight with realistic hope, not to destroy
all the world's wrong, but to renew its good.
Make them victors and healers, let them be
unsentimental and compassionate;
spill not their generous blood abundantly
as gifts of stockings and gum and chocolate.
Let them be modest, knowing the irony
of hard-fought peace, our bold united youth
returned in strength across the migrant sea,
rebuilding and restoring law and truth—
then afterward, when the last prayer's been said,
Home for the living, burial for the dead.

And now I am going to go to sleep. I have been scribbling this by flashlight under my borrowed US Army blanket. I'm not flying the Oxford back—they want to keep that here for local taxi runs—so one of the RAF pilots at the Front will come pick up Roger to take him to his next stop, and I am going to swap

planes and take a Spitfire back to Southampton for a new paint job (it is being modified for reconnaissance).

Now that I want to go to sleep, I can't put my notebook and flashlight down on the ground, because it's just an ocean of mud, and I don't want to get out of bed and wake everybody up hunting for a place to put them. So I guess I'll shove everything down at my feet and hope I don't kick it out of bed. I'd put the notebook under my pillow except I haven't got one! I hope I don't forget it tomorrow morning.

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“Chiltern Edge”

1 Thames View
Medmenham, nr. Marlow
Bucks

4 October 1944

Dear Mrs. Beaufort-Stuart,

Thank you for all your thoughtful effort over the past three weeks. I wish I had some good news, or even some small shred of hopeful news, to pass to you and your fellow pilots. But there isn't anything—not a single thing. As time moves on and so many others are also lost, it seems selfish to keep badgering for an investigation into one more missing aircraft, especially as it wasn't entirely aboveboard for Rose to be in France in the first place. My husband, Roger, feels keenly that if he makes a fuss about losing Rose, none of the rest of you young ladies will ever be allowed to fly in Europe.

I do not want to give up hope, but I do not think we are ever going to hear anything now. Roger says her family won't even get a military pension. I suppose you know that, being a civilian pilot yourself. But it does seem dreadfully unfair.

Perhaps you would like to write to her parents. I think they would appreciate hearing from one of Rose's friends. Sometimes I think I will send them the poem you copied out for me from her notebook, the “Battle Hymn.” *“Home for the living, burial for the dead.”* And then I think I won't, as poor Rose will have neither.

I shall leave it up to you.

Thank you again for all your past kindness, to me and to my missing niece.

Yours sincerely,

Edith Justice

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Justice Airfield

Mt. Jericho, Pa.

23 November 1944

Thanksgiving Day

Dear First Officer Beaufort-Stuart,

I want to thank you myself for the effort you've made on our daughter's behalf. You say in your letter that you don't feel you've done enough, but in every telegram from Roger and in all of Edie's letters, they always mention you. I know how many times you've telephoned Edie to check for news—that you supplied your husband's squadron in Europe with Rose's picture so they will know who to look for—that you took over the sad task of sorting through Rose's things and packed them up for Edie to send us. She also sent us the newspaper clipping you gave her about the shot-down gunner who spent three months hiding in France. But I think it is better for us to face the worst than to hold out for good news that will never come.

Even if there is no way for you to turn back time or find out what really happened that morning in September, it means a great deal to all of us to know that Rose had such a devoted friend so far from home.

Thank you also for the photograph from your wedding. It is the last picture we have got of Rose. You all look so excited and happy, and the ivy-covered church nestled in the heather is an idyllic setting for a wartime marriage—my boys noticed your husband has got a football tucked under his arm! It is hard to believe you were only temporarily “between bombs.”

I never imagined—never could have imagined—even flying over the hell of no-man's-land myself in the last war—that less than thirty years later, another war would cost me a daughter.

On behalf of myself and Rose's mother, Grace

Mae, and Rose's young brothers, Karl and Kurt, thank you for being Rose's friend.

Yours sincerely,
Jack Justice

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Krefeld, Germany

10 March 1945

My bonny Maddie-lass,

I am flying Hudsons now, transport and parachutists—dropping madmen deep into Germany on God knows what missions. I fly only one night in four. Mostly I sit around all day smoking or go on schnapps hunts with other idle airmen.

I look for your Rose everywhere I go. I think I am really looking for our Julie, who I know is dead. If I could just win *one damned personal victory*, you know? We are into Germany but still not across the Rhine, and all I feel is grief and horror. I cannot describe to you the horror of this war, Maddie. I do not want to. I think the biggest surprise is that I don't have more friends and big brothers and little sisters who are dead. The destruction we are heaping upon the German cities is unimaginable—it is *shameful*. It makes me feel ashamed to be one of the victors. And then we come across a row of railway wagons abandoned on a siding under the snow and packed with hundreds of frozen, emaciated bodies—*hundreds* of them, unexplained, some of them children—and I know that we *must* be the victors. Whatever the shame—whatever the cost.

I look for your Rose in every face, dead and living. But there are so many, and all of them are ravaged by hunger and grief and loss, even the faces of the enemy. I swear, it's sometimes hard to tell which faces do belong to the so-called enemy. Deserters hide as civilians to avoid capture not only by us but also by their own army, and civilians surprise you with hospitality and gratitude. I met a group of four displaced men traveling together—two had escaped from a German prison camp, and the other two were shot-down German airmen trying to get back to their base. All we did was trade cigarettes. Strip men of

uniforms and badges and they are just men.

A year and a half ago, when we first lost track of Julie, I remember you described the way people disappear into the Nazi death machine like an unlucky lapwing hitting the propeller of a Lancaster bomber—nothing left but feathers blowing away in the aircraft's wake, as if those warm wings and beating heart had never existed. It has happened to *tens of thousands* of people. Maybe hundreds of thousands or even millions. They are *gone*. They have vanished without leaving even a vapor trail. Everywhere I go I meet people who are hunting for husbands, mothers, children, brothers, sisters, cousins, friends, lovers, and they are *all gone*.

Your friend Rose has evaporated with them. I don't know what else to tell you, Maddie.

What a miserable letter! And your last one to me was so full of encouragement and flying stories. I am afraid you will cry when you read this one. I wish I hadn't mentioned the frozen children. But you know I would never be anything less than wholly honest with you.

Here is better news to end with—surprising, but positive at least. The Boy Nick has got married. I think it was partly a way for him to cope with losing Rose, but partly, it is true, he has found another lovely girl. His new bride is also American, a Red Cross worker who does counseling and social work for the troops. She is not made of the same strong stuff your Rose was, but to tell the truth, the Boy Nick isn't, either. Maybe it's as well they didn't tie the knot last summer.

I am desperate for it to be over now, and to see you again and to be with you always.

thine ain true
Jamie

This pretty book is all that's left of Rose and her poetry. She's written my name in the front—"A present from Maddie Brodatt." The army nurses she was staying with at Camp Los Angeles found it in her camp bed. I should have sent it to her mother and father, I suppose, but I haven't got the heart. I remember when I gave it to her, to write Celia's accident report in.

Oh Rose, Rose. Bloody, bloody hell.

I've lost you—lost another friend—"as if those warm wings and beating heart had never existed." This war has taken my best friend and my bridesmaid from me in the space of a year. IT ISN'T FAIR.

Oh, Rose—when the US Army Air Force transport pilot from Camp Los Angeles dropped your notebook off at Operations in Hamble last September, for a long time I still hoped you'd turn up and I could give it back to you. I know it's possible to crash-land in occupied Europe and make it out alive. I know.

So I find it impossible to "close the book"—to accept that you're not coming back. And just in case I'm right, I am going to leave your notebook and my letters for you to collect at the American Embassy in Paris. I think you're as likely to end up there as anywhere, if you're still alive. Your uncle Roger is in on my plot and has already filled a safe-deposit box there for you with a little money and a letter from your family. He's told the embassy to put you up at the Ritz Paris until other arrangements are made for you. What it's like to have relatives in high places! Not that it makes much difference to you now.

Writing to you like this makes me feel that you are still alive. It's an illusion I've noticed before—words on a page are like oxygen to a petrol engine, firing up ghosts. It lasts only while the words are in your head. After you put down the paper or the pen, the pistons fall lifeless again.

If this message ever reaches you—I know you have family in England and plenty of loving friends and family back home in America—but my mother-in-law, Esmé

Beaufort-Stuart, says that you have got a home-from-home with her as well and please to contact her without hesitation. It is a better address to leave than mine—at the moment I am still being sent all over everywhere with work, and I don't know where I'll be by the time this ever catches up with you. Esmé's address, you probably know, is Craig Castle, Castle Craig, Aberdeenshire. That is pretty much also her telephone number, which I don't actually know—I just ask the operator for Craig Castle when I ring them.

Esmé has always been generous about giving a home to waifs and strays and other exiles. There is a band of Tinkers who stop on their riverbank every year for a month—Julie and Jamie were so familiar with them as children that they picked up their strange dialect! And then there are the evacuee lads from Glasgow, whom you've met—Esmé has actually adopted two of them now, though the others have gone home. She has also got a dozen wounded airmen convalescing there. For Esmé, I think, the war effort will continue for a while after the war has officially ended.

And, of course, there is me. I am one of her waifs and strays, too. She would do anything for me, I think, so on my behalf and by her own invitation, you must consider Craig Castle one of your homes-from-home. Bring your friends.

That's given me hope—a vision of you and a lot of other Rose-like people drinking coffee and singing songs from Girl Guide camp, while Esmé plays the piano, in the morning sunlight of the Little Drawing Room at Craig Castle.

*Your fellow pilot and loving friend,
Maddie*

P.S. Fliss and I had to go through your things like we did with Celia's, and I kept your fuse—I wanted to keep something of yours. I don't suppose you'll ever want it back, but it seemed a bit horrible to return it to your aunt

Edie.

Oh, Rose—what happened to you?

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everyone in my transport is condemned to death, on
 of us. They've executed dozens of us already. But so
 s all to end up dead anyway, they used us—tested
 he couldn't find the right words. I don't think she co
 words like experiment and trial and medical, and they
 hat it sounded like she was telling a really bad joke.
 tudents from my transport. My special transport. Like
 its, Króliki—Kaninchen in German. Actually, what we
 ted on yelled it at one of the doctors and he thought
 ut us up like rabbits. **Part 2**
RAVENSBRÜCK Our calf open an
 er for two weeks. Or they'd cut pieces out of your
 f your leg and try to stick it in someone else's leg. I
 o young and healthy, get it? They said they wanted
 leans the Eastern Front, which is where most of Ger
 sounds on us. Make a hole like a gunshot wound and
 in a trench and never change the dressing. Guess
 eedles seemed to waver in front of my face, as if I
 ll show you what happens—" She barked orders in
 hey never stopped knitting. They turned around on t
 vere on the table. They stuck their own legs out in f
 vere models at a fashion show. I burst out, "I heard
 ered on the concrete floor and the girl next to her
 itement, and then suddenly the whole room was buzzi
 you heard? On the radio? On the BBC? What did th
 r, "Some of us died of it, some of us have been exe
 ighting to get the story to spread outside the Camp.

Rose Moyer Justice

Handwriting Sample, 17 April 1945

Paris, France

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

They told me to stop after I listed the “unalienable Rights.” By then I had written enough for them to tell it really was my handwriting, and I was crying so hard I could barely see the page. *Life. Liberty. Happiness.* Unalienable rights.

I can write again. Oh, God! *I can write again.* All those months of not being able to write! Of not being *allowed to write.* More than six months of hiding pencil stubs in the hem of my dress, hiding chips of charcoal in my cheek, hiding torn shreds of newsprint in my shoes. Knowing I'd be shot if I was caught with any of it. And SO MUCH that I wanted to write. It seems like I have been a prisoner for *so long.*

I can write!

It feels dangerous—like stealing a plane. But it is my unalienable Right. And this is my own notebook, which they gave back to me in the American Embassy this morning, along with an enormous pile of cash from Uncle Roger and a temporary passport. The passport is made out in the name of Rose Moyer Justice; date of birth, 22 October 1925; place of issue, Paris; date of issue, 17 April 1945, today. I mean

yesterday. And a photograph that Aunt Edie had sent them, a wallet-sized copy of my portrait in ATA uniform from last spring.

I have changed so drastically since then that no one at the embassy could tell this photograph is really me. That's why they made me write out the opening lines of the Declaration of Independence—so they could compare it to my handwriting in the rest of this notebook. My handwriting has not changed. My signature matches, too. Mother had sent them my Pennsylvania driver's license as a sample.

That has convinced even me that I am still Rose—my handwriting has not changed. It is the only physical thing about me that looks exactly the same. I can still write.

In fact, it is the only thing I *can* do. I can't even sleep. The embassy people checked me in here at the Paris Ritz and left me in this gigantic room Aunt Edie has reserved for me, but I sat on the floor for three hours because I didn't dare to touch any of the beautiful furniture. Then I got up and spent another hour pacing, checking the Place Vendôme every time a car or truck went by just in case it was Bob Ernst coming back. But now it is nearly three in the morning and nothing is going by anymore. My brain won't let me go to sleep—my internal clock is tensed for the four a.m. siren. I tried to get dressed again, but I can't *bear* to put those dead women's clothes back on, not if I have to go naked for the rest of my life. It's not that cold here. Anyway I'm used to being cold. And also used to being wide awake when all I want to do is collapse.

What I'm not used to is being by myself.

How could it have happened? I don't know how it happened. I LOST THEM. Irina and Róża, my more-than-sisters, Russian *taran* pilot and Polish Rabbit—I couldn't have escaped without them, I couldn't have survived last winter without them, and I have lost them *both*.

But I'm kidding myself. I do know how it happened. If I hadn't been so set on getting to Paris—if I hadn't rushed off with Bob Ernst in that convoy of American soldiers—if I had double-checked what was going on. We camped overnight with the Swedish Red Cross unit and I was talking with Bob and that Minnesotan chaplain who was interpreting for the Swedes, and I

told them *myself* that Róza needed medical treatment. Only it never occurred to me they would leave her with the Red Cross without asking me—without even telling me! Irina was with her and I was in Bob's jeep, and we set off the next morning near the front of the convoy. I never dreamed Róza wasn't following in one of the trucks with Irina. So stupid of me! Of course the Swedish Red Cross unit was going back to *Sweden*.

I've lost Róza and Irina.

I feel like my world has ended.

But it hasn't—not even the war has ended yet. It just keeps going relentlessly on and on and on, like a concentration camp roll call when they can't get the numbers to come out right. And I guess I just go on and on, too.

I wonder what has happened to Nick since last August. Oh, Nick! I have dreamed of seeing him again for so long, made up all those stories about him coming to rescue me—but what will he think when he sees what a walking corpse I've become? How can I tell him what happened to me, all I've seen and had to do?

A lot of it is a blur anyway. I don't remember the first time I thought I was so hungry I was going to die. I don't remember when the chilblains started, or whether it was on my hands or feet first. I don't remember the details of being beaten. I know my sentence was “with force,” which means on your bare backside, but I don't remember them pulling up my dress, not either time. I remember trying to count the blows but not what it felt like. I have blocked it out.

I remember standing through a roll call in the dark, at the end of a twelve-hour workday when I'd been so behind that I didn't get to stop to eat, and being so cold it *hurt*, and someone behind me started to cry. And then I started crying, too, and in ten seconds the whole block was crying. And they shut us up by threatening us with the dogs, and then they made us stand there for another hour—just those of us who were crying. Everyone else, thousands of them, went to bed, but Block 32 was still standing there, trying not to cry while we all slowly froze to death.

But I don't remember what it felt like to be that cold. Isn't that crazy? I can't *imagine* what it felt like. And it couldn't have

been more than a few months ago.

The strange thing is, nothing about the past winter has taken the edge off the memory of my last ATA ferry delivery, the day I took off from Camp Los Angeles in France and landed somewhere near Mannheim in Germany.

I'm going to write it down. I'm wide awake and I'm sick of thinking over and over about the last twenty-four hours' worth of disaster. Maybe if I think hard about last September I will be able to forget about today for long enough to let me go to sleep.

Roger left Camp LA before I did. The RAF pilot arrived in the Spitfire I was supposed to take back to England, and we swapped planes; I stood next to the mechanic who telephoned Caen to say I might land there to refuel. I wonder if Caen ever looked for me. Maybe everybody thinks I ran out of fuel over the English Channel.

I remember that flight as if I had the map sitting on my lap with the route outlined in china pencil and a great big "X Marks the Spot" over Épernay. That is where I met the flying bomb. Was it aimed at Paris—was it one last attempt to destroy Paris? It must have been air-launched, but I don't know where it was heading. It was too far inland to be aimed at London. I think about this a lot...where that bomb was heading. Other than on a collision course with me, I mean.

I thought it was another plane at first. It looked like another plane. I had a perfectly clear view of it as it came slowly closer and closer, seeming to hover in the same spot just ahead of my wingtip, an unbudging speck in the distant sky like a little black star, or a bug. It didn't scare me. I assumed it was an Allied plane because I was over Allied territory. So I did exactly what Maddie said she'd done when she saw a flying bomb in the air—I waggled my wings at it. And of course got no response.

I thought, gee whiz, the pilot must be looking at his map—or blind—or asleep—

—or *there isn't any pilot.*

I should have made a steep turn to get out of its way. This is what I dread telling Daddy. That I went after it *on purpose.*

I was so sure it was headed for Paris, beautiful Paris. Still

intact. And if this bomb hit its target, there would be a gigantic crater, broken glass everywhere, dust, summer trees that looked like winter, just like London—I couldn't stand it.

I pushed the Spitfire's nose down and went into a screaming downhill dive to gain speed, and the bomb sped straight on about a hundred feet over me. I glanced up and saw it, huge, in silhouette for a fraction of a second, a black cross of wings and fuselage blotting out the sky. Then I shoved on full power and pulled out of the dive in a climbing turn.

Then I was chasing it.

I wasn't thinking about engine pressure or fuel or anything—I was just hell bent on getting every extra second possible of power and speed out of that Spitfire. And yard by yard, I gained on the bomb.

I must have been going four hundred miles an hour. But it didn't feel fast. It felt like getting your teeth pulled.

"Come on—come on—"

I talked to the plane like it was a racehorse. I couldn't hear a thing with full power; I couldn't hear the sound of my own voice.

"Come on—nearly there!"

And then I'd overshot it. Getting the speed right was the hardest thing I have ever done—probably the best flying I have ever done, too. I overtook the bomb *four times* before I found that sweet place on the throttle that let me scream along beside it in the air. And then I got my wing under the bomb's wing on the first try. *I didn't even touch it.* I saw the bomb wobble in the air, and I shoved full power on again to get out of its way. Then I looked back over my shoulder and saw the bomb tip down gently, gently into a spin, just like Celia's Tempest.

I let out a scream of nerve and fury and exhilaration, and cut the power and set up the Spit for a straight and level cruise, and began to battle the first wave of guilt.

Do you have ANY IDEA how much fuel you just wasted?

I didn't even see the stupid bomb hit the ground—I was so busy trying to reestablish myself in real life. It must be what Superman feels like after racing through the sky following a speeding locomotive and then ten seconds later peering at the

world through Clark Kent's nearsighted glasses.

How much fuel have I wasted and where the heck am I?

How much fuel have I wasted and where the heck am I and did I damage the engine?

I was starting to panic. I knew I had to calm down, so I began to orbit—long, lazy ovals over rolling French crazy quilt fields and woods. I was too high to see where my bomb hit—or maybe I was already too far away to see it. I knew I had to figure out where I was and how to get to Caen from there. I'd been relay-racing with the bomb for about a quarter of an hour, which meant I was now ironically southwest of Paris, about halfway between Paris and Dijon—that bomb wouldn't have hit Paris anyway. I thought and scribbled on my map for ten minutes while I circled. I knew that all the time I was circling I was wasting still more fuel, but I needed to get it right.

I guess Daddy would say I had my head down in the cockpit for too long. He'd say I didn't keep enough of a lookout. It's true I didn't see them coming. But I don't think I could have done anything about it even if I had.

I didn't know what the intercepting planes were. I knew they were German and I could tell they had jet engines, but I didn't have a clue what the planes *were*. They were in Luftwaffe camouflage, with black crosses on their fuselages and swastikas on their tailplanes. Their engines hung down from their wings like bombs. I'd never seen *anything* fly that fast.

I know now that in German they're called *Schwalben*, Swallows. They were Messerschmitt Me-262s. Those planes did fly just like a couple of swallows, great big enormous swallows with jet engines strapped under their wings. The first one came at me from below and behind, and the other from above and behind, and they corkscrewed around me with their engines roaring, and suddenly they were gone, one of them breaking left and the other right—but I was still in my wide, slow orbit and they came screaming back at me, one passing me on each side. It was exactly like watching swallows flying.

I did two things. I leveled out and headed northwest, straight back toward England as fast as I could go, and I flashed every single light I had—landing lights, nav lights, cockpit

floodlights—and I pulled the flares out, something I’ve never, ever done before, to let them know I wasn’t armed. They came at me again and one of them settled on my tail—I could see him over my shoulder as I tried frantically to urge the speed up and flash lights with the same hand. I was so afraid he was going to blast me out of the sky that it took me a while to notice the other one flying calmly ahead of me, deliberately keeping pace with me. He wasn’t aggressive. He just flew along and let me set the speed. He was so close I could see the pilot’s head in the cockpit. After a moment he rocked his wings at me: *HI*.

I let go of the lights and kept my hand on the throttle. I pushed the control column gently from side to side. Light touch, one finger, trained in me from the age of twelve. *HI* yourself.

God.

He made a wide, level turn to the left, practically a U-turn, and headed off back in the other direction.

I actually sobbed aloud with panicked relief, praying that I would never see him again, that I’d never see another Luftwaffe aircraft in my whole life. But then I glanced back over my shoulder and the other guy was still there, stuck to my tail.

“GO AWAY!” I screamed pointlessly at the sky.

In about a minute the first guy was back in exactly the same deliberate position ahead of me and to my left, and when he knew I was watching, he rocked his wings *again*.

And I figured out what he meant: *FOLLOW ME*.

“No no *no*,” I sobbed at the indifferent sky.

I knew what I was supposed to do. I was supposed to rock my wings to answer him and let him know I was ready to follow his instructions. But I didn’t. I wasn’t ready to follow his instructions. So I just kept flying stubbornly straight in the direction I was heading and ignored him.

And the other guy, the one flying behind me, *fired at me*.

Actually he fired into the empty sky above me. Just one burst, a warning shot of automatic cannon fire. He didn’t hit me; I didn’t feel it in the airframe like I felt the hailstorm last summer, but the shock of the sky erupting around me had the same effect on me as being punched in the stomach. For a moment I couldn’t breathe. My hand forced the throttle

automatically, but I couldn't make the Spit go any faster.

The pilot in front of me rocked his wings a third time: last warning.

I was gasping for air now. I didn't have a choice. I couldn't outrun them and I couldn't fight them. So I had to go with them.

I took a shuddering breath and rocked my own wings again: *I'M COMING*.

The pilot ahead of me made another long, lazy U-turn. This time I turned after him. The pilot on my rear end followed me around. I could see them wave casually as they passed each other in the air.

We lined up in formation flying straight and level in the wrong direction, with me in the middle, one hand shaking on the throttle and one hand shaking on the control column, both feet shaking against the rudder pedals, half blinded by tears and terror. I tried to imagine the report I'd have to file. *Controlled flight into terrain* was all I could think of. That's what they call it when you're flying in a cloud and you crash into a mountain you didn't see—*controlled flight into terrain*.

We avoided overflying cities. We avoided overflying camps and troops. We flew high over the Front and then over the German border, which was marked on my map as the Siegfried Line. We crossed the Rhine north of Mannheim, where my map stopped. But I didn't. I kept flying, with a pair of Luftwaffe jets escorting me deeper and deeper into Germany.

I flew with them for *two hundred miles*. They kept taking turns to zip ahead of me and circle back. There was always one of them with me, behind or ahead of me.

After the first fifteen minutes, once I got used to the whole nightmare weirdness of what was happening, there wasn't really anything for me to do except keep the Spitfire pointing in the direction they chose for me, and try to figure out where the heck we were and where the heck we were going. I realized this was the most important thing I could do—exactly what you'd do if you accidentally flew into a cloud. Pay attention to your heading, the time, and how fast you're going, so you can turn around and *find your way back*.

It looked so much like Pennsylvania! All fields and farms and woods and rivers, and there at the edge of the map was “Mannheim,” which is the name of the nearest town to Conewago Grove—Mannheim is where we always go for our groceries in the summer. But it’s not the same Mannheim. I can’t remember how to convert my indicated airspeed to true airspeed. I’m not being accurate. I am in Germany. I am off the map.

I reached the point where I started to wonder if I was really still alive. I thought maybe I got killed in my attempt to tip the flying bomb or when the Swallow shot at me, and now I was in purgatory, doomed to fly forever and ever over fields that looked like Pennsylvania without ever being able to land. The only way to prove I was still alive was to land in a field, or to turn around and fly in the other direction. But if I *was* still alive, and this *was* really happening, then the Luftwaffe aircraft on my tail would blast me out of the sky if I tried to get away from them. So I couldn’t risk turning or landing in case I *was* still alive. I had to keep flying.

I think it’s taken me about the same amount of time to write this as it took me to fly it. That’s kind of incredible. I am writing at a rate of 170 miles an hour and going nowhere. I’m getting tired now. But my brain is still in the air over Mannheim, so I’d better land before I try to sleep again or I’ll be counting the miles and reciting the headings in my dreams.

I don’t know the name of the aerodrome where they led me to. The leader pulled out ahead of me over the runway with his landing gear lowered. He didn’t touch down, though; he went screaming away for another circuit. I was so stupid with fear and confusion that I just followed him back up into the sky. The other guy was orbiting above us now, watching the show from 2000 feet.

They wanted me to land ahead of them, leaving them behind in the sky while I came back to earth all by myself IN GERMANY. I refused to play. They were the only friends I had anymore. I was not going to land without them.

We went round and round the aerodrome. Finally the

leader landed. I tried to land behind him, but the turbulence of his horrible jet engines knocked my wings around so much I thought I was going to stall, and by the time I straightened out, the runway was behind me and I had to go around AGAIN. I was on my fifth circuit now and I was sick of it.

Show 'em how to land a plane, Rosie.

I wish Daddy had seen it. I floated down with one finger on the control column and I had only a third of the runway behind me when I stopped rolling. I didn't bother to get off the runway. I didn't want to get out. I didn't want to look. I rested my forehead on the control panel and waited.

I can't stay awake another second. It is getting light.

Three hours' sleep. That's about as good as it gets. I did dream about flying—I guess that's no surprise. It wasn't a bad dream. I was over wooded mountains somewhere—it looked like the foothills of the Pa. Alleghenies, but it could just as easily have been southwestern Germany. It was snowing. I wasn't scared.

It is a beautiful, beautiful spring morning out there in Paris—my windows are all wide open, and the air and sky are wonderful. I woke up because I was cold, sleeping in my birthday suit with no covers. I don't even try to pull up the covers in my sleep—I just assume there aren't any covers. My sleeping brain tells me, of course I am cold. I am always cold, right? Curl up in a ball and try to go back to sleep before the next siren.

I am so *lonesome*. I thought I'd want to forget last winter's hell, but now I am in a panic in case I *do* forget. So busy remembering that impossible list of Polish prisoners and the flight times and headings that the faces of my friends, and their kindness and strength and bravery, are fading into a tangled blur of exhaustion and hunger. I am going to write it all down in order, the best I can do. I think writing helped me to sleep this morning—at least it tired me out so much I did sleep. I have really missed being able to write things down. I never thought of writing as a luxury or a privilege. But of course it is. *An unalienable right.*

So there I was, on the ground in Germany at the unknown airfield, clenching my hands shut for the first time in two hours and waiting for the storm to break.

It didn't take long. I didn't see what was happening, because my head was down and my eyes were closed, but after a few seconds the plane started rolling again. I stomped on the brakes but got unexpected resistance, and I jerked my head up wildly to find out what was going on because the engine was off and the brakes were on and the Spitfire was still inching forward.

Twenty men were pushing and pulling at it. One of them saw that I was up and not dead, and he waved at me frantically and pointed overhead. I looked up—the second Swallow still hadn't landed and my plane was in his way. They were trying desperately to clear the runway for him. I think he was out of fuel.

I let go of the brakes and the men around my plane rolled it off the runway at racing speed, just like a bunch of kids getting a go-cart or a sled moving. The other plane came roaring in past me just as I felt the bump as I went over the rough ground at the edge of the concrete.

Someone jumped up on the wing and banged on the canopy with his fist, shouting at me to open up. He pointed a pistol at me with his other hand.

I didn't fight. I really didn't want them to kill me. But also I had no idea, *no idea* what they were going to do to me, so I cooperated very, very slowly. My hands shook so much I couldn't get that stupid, cranky catch on the cockpit door in the right position, and the guy banged on the canopy again and shouted, "*Schnell!*" Hurry up. That was the first time I heard German spoken on the ground in Germany. "*Schnell! Schnell!*"

I knew what it meant because Mother and Grampa say it when they want the kids to hurry. Grampa is very Dutch. We say we are Pennsylvania Dutch, but we are not Dutch. The word is just American for *Deutsch*; it means "German" in German. I am Pennsylvania German. "All men are created equal." *We are all the same.*

I got the sliding hood open, and the man on the wing

yanked the canopy back. He gestured with his gun—*get out of the plane*. I still couldn't get the door open and had to climb out the open hood, trying to keep my hands up and my skirt down and not fall off the wing at the same time.

It is a pain in the neck climbing in and out of a Spitfire in a skirt.

In a million years, I bet, those German airmen would not have guessed a girl was going to climb out of that plane. They must have thought all along that they'd captured an RAF reconnaissance pilot taking pictures or on his way to suss out German airfields full of jet-powered Swallows so we could bomb them. Someone doing something secret and interesting. And here I turned out to be a boring old transport pilot—and a *girl*.

I stood on the wing with my hands up. They all backed away respectfully, their mouths open.

Somebody started to clap. Then they all joined in—a brief burst of applause for the perfect landing. The guy with the gun suddenly stuck it back in his holster, jumped to the ground, and held out a hand to help me down. He mimed taking my flying helmet off, so I did, and the curls came tumbling down. I was a mess, with my hair sticking out in all directions and my eyes all red—I'd spent a lot of the last hour sobbing to myself. One of the mechanics respectfully whipped off his cap.

The man who had the gun gave an order, and somebody climbed up to the cockpit to get all my stuff, my parachute and maps and flight bag. They let me take off my life jacket, too, and someone took it from me so I didn't have to carry it. Then we all trudged across the airfield, everybody muttering and whispering to each other, till we got to a crop of concrete buildings and temporary hangars, all draped top to bottom in camouflage. The gunman took me to an office and pulled out a chair for me. Then he dug into the pocket of his tunic and pulled out a *mirror and a tortoiseshell comb*. And he gave them to me and made a little bow and left the room.

For a moment I started giggling hysterically. A mirror and comb!

You know, it was like putting on armor. I combed my hair,

and then I realized how awful my face looked, so I dug out a handkerchief—it was one of the ones Aunt Rainy embroidered for me, with a rose in the corner—and I wiped my eyes and then spit on the hanky and scrubbed at my face, and then I dug out a lipstick and did my lips and faked some color in my cheeks, and then I felt better. Less pathetic, more grown-up. On one wall of the office was a huge map of France and Germany and the Low Countries. I sat staring at it, finding the names of cities I'd heard of, and plotting course headings from each of these cities to Paris. It was better than thinking about what was going to happen next.

Someone came in and gave me a cup of fake coffee and something a lot like a bologna sandwich, which I would have eaten if I had realized it was the last bologna sandwich I was ever going to see. But I just couldn't eat. I have had dreams about that sandwich.

After a while people began to file into the office and filled it up. One was a Luftwaffe interrogator, I think, but he didn't talk to me directly. The man who talked to me was just another pilot. They got him to come in because he spoke very good English. There was also a girl in uniform who took notes.

The first thing they did was spread my passport and license and authorization card across the steel desk and then dump out my confiscated Camp LA groceries next to the ID. The translator made a sweeping gesture at the pile of Hershey bars. He said seriously, "You see, you are in a lot of trouble."

I had to clamp a hand over my mouth. It was all I could do not to fall apart with hysteria—it was so funny! Terrible, but so *funny*. What were they accusing me of—chocolate smuggling?

I nodded mutely, because really I did agree with him—I knew I was in trouble. But I had to gulp back squeaks of hilarity. The way he pointed to that candy! He was about Daddy's age—tired-looking, tall and thin, with a wide mouth and a nice smile. He looked like the fire chief in Conewago Grove. He sat across from me, peering earnestly into my face with his hands on his knees, as though he were cross-examining his own daughter over something that had disappointed him.

"You are American?"

I could only nod. I didn't trust myself to try to talk.

"In a British plane?"

"I am—" I got the hysterics under control and sat on my hands to keep them away from my mouth.

"Why is an American flying a British plane?" the translator asked patiently.

"I was—I was only delivering it," I squeaked.

"You are a courier?" the translator asked.

I nodded, because I thought he meant "delivery girl"—then immediately panicked and shook my head violently to take it back. Aren't couriers some kind of intelligence agents?

"No—no! I'm a ferry pilot. Air Transport Auxiliary—I deliver planes for the Royal Air Force."

"What variety is your Spitfire?"

"Mark Fourteen."

The translator looked over his shoulder at the others and told them what I'd said, and they all nodded and muttered to one another. Then the translator asked me, "The plane has a radio device?"

"Yes—"

The stenographer looked up sharply. She stared at me with a face full of awe and suspicion, as though she wanted to see what kind of person would have the gall to fly a plane equipped with a "radio device." I don't know how much English she understood, but she must have understood everything the interrogator and the translator had just said to each other.

What were they after? Maybe they didn't mean a radio. Maybe "radio device" was an attempt to translate something else. I asked, "Do you mean radar?" Radar would make it a surveillance aircraft—a spy plane. And suddenly I was more frightened than I'd been before.

"I mean, no! There's no radar on that plane—"

I stopped abruptly, shaking my head and sucking in a gasp of air. *I didn't know* if there was a radar set on that plane. I didn't think there was—I knew the real thing takes up a lot of space, but I wasn't *sure*. That Spitfire was new this year and was about to be modified for reconnaissance.

“I don’t know!”

“You were orbiting when you were intercepted—why? Taking pictures?”

“No! There’s no radar and no cameras—I don’t think there are—”

I didn’t know that, either. I didn’t know anything about what that plane might be carrying in its wings, other than fuel—cameras, cannon, spy equipment, plastic explosive—who knows? I don’t *think* there was anything like that on board, but who knows?

It just went downhill from there—everybody as polite as possible, and me not knowing the answer to anything they asked me. “But I was in France!” I pointed out miserably. “I wasn’t even over your territory!”

“It was ours last week,” the translator said calmly.

None of this actually took very long. All the administration was done that day—the telephone calls after they finished questioning me, and the decision from some command center in Berlin, and the paperwork—all magically completed in less than two hours. I don’t think the Luftwaffe pilots knew where I’d end up. They just did what they were told to do with me.

The translator was a transport pilot, too. He was delivering a small communications aircraft to its new home base. It wasn’t far from a place where they held a lot of women who were political prisoners, and I was supposed to go along with him so he could drop me there.

The little plane looked like a flying lawnmower with awnings. “It is a Storch,” the pilot told me. “Fieseler Fi-156. Stork, in English. Bird with long legs!”

I tried to smile at the lame joke.

“Don’t be frightened. You will be safe where they send you. The papers we have given you state that you are a transport pilot and that you were intercepted without weapons—you will have to remain in custody here, but you will be fed and clothed and housed—” He hesitated a little. “And given work to do. They will find work for you at a skilled level. Don’t lose the written statement our commander gave you—it explains how you came here, and it is important that you show the Luftwaffe

stamp and signature, for you won't always be able to find another English speaker as fluent as I to give you assistance!"

We finished the outside aircraft checks, and the pilot opened the door for me to climb into the rear seat.

"I am Oberleutnant Karl Womelsdorff," he said.

"I am Third Officer Rose Justice," I told him. "My little brother is named Karl, too."

"Why this German name for an American boy?"

"My mother's family is from Germany," I said. "Two hundred years ago they came to America from right around here, from Pfaltz. A lot of people in Pennsylvania come from southwest Germany."

Oberleutnant Karl Womelsdorff glanced at me with a tight, sad smile as he climbed into the pilot's seat ahead of me.

"Now you are back," he said.

Holy smoke, that plane. How did I ever fly that plane?

"You will fly the Storch," Oberleutnant Womelsdorff told me. I don't think he meant it to sound so much like a command. It was a present, a wonderful secret between us, one pilot to another, and a very generous present, too, considering I was a prisoner of war or whatever.

Compared with the morning's high-speed chase in the Spitfire it was like being on a bicycle. We didn't go very high, staying out of the way of planes that might be faster than us—or planes that might try to shoot us down. It was a mercy to be flying, to be focused on the unfamiliar aircraft and the heading and being too close for comfort to the treetops and just to be in control.

In the officers' restroom at Köthen, where we stopped to refuel, I sat with my head against my knees and cried for five minutes. It was like digging myself deeper and deeper into a pit that I'd never be able to climb out of. I was halfway across Germany now and I still didn't know where I was going to end up.

When we took off from Köthen, Womelsdorff let me sit in the front.

“What if someone sees me in the pilot’s seat when we land? Won’t you be in trouble?”

He shrugged and laughed. “Why should I be, if we land in the right place? We’ll say you are the American cousin of Hanna Reitsch. You know of Hanna Reitsch? Germany’s most daring test pilot is a woman! As long as there are two of us in the plane they will not accuse me of wasting fuel we do not have.” I didn’t dare to answer. I am pretty sure he wasn’t supposed to tell me that the Luftwaffe is low on fuel.

The last stage of the trip was cloudier and bumpier, and Womelsdorff made me stay even lower, to avoid being *bombed*. Once we saw a flight of Allied aircraft crossing the sky ahead of us—high, dozens of them, steady black spots speckling the clouds like a swarm of gnats—heading, no doubt, for Berlin.

We pattered along far below them, slow and out of sight against the ground.

“Daylight raid,” commented my guard and guide. “Is this arrogance or desperation?”

I didn’t answer. I didn’t know. But now I think the answer wasn’t either of those—it was really just *persistence*. *Persistence* is what kept me alive all winter. And persistence will win the war.

Half an hour south of Neubrandenburg we flew almost directly over a pretty town surrounded by serene lakes. We were so low over the biggest lake I could see the reflection of our wings below us in its glassy surface. On the far side of the lake was a gigantic complex of long sheds and wide-open gridded yards, all in the middle of a complicated railway junction—everything surrounded by concrete walls and what looked like miles and miles of wire fences.

“What’s that?”

“Fürstenberg industrial area,” Womelsdorff answered. “You’ll only ever see it from the air—the maps show only the town and the lakes. What they make there is a state secret. Impossible to miss from the air, so it makes an excellent pinpoint. That is a pilot’s secret.”

It was my first sight of Ravensbrück.

I saw it for the first time from the air. I have spent a long

time—mostly during roll calls—trying to put together my first view of it from a thousand feet overhead with the view from the parade ground in front of Block 32. I just can't justify in my head that I must have been looking at the same sky in both places. From the air it was forbidding but not menacing. It looked sterile. It was just a place. It didn't even look inhabited—of course, it was the middle of the afternoon and everyone must have been at work, so the grounds were relatively empty.

I wish I'd known—I wish I could remember the detail of what it looked like from the air. Was there smoke coming from the crematorium chimney? Were they loading or unloading transports? Was a train arriving? It was so still, so empty, so impersonal—so distant. It was an ordinary industrial site in the middle of an ordinary day. It didn't mean anything to me, it wasn't significant or ominous, and the detail is gone. A pilot's pinpoint. That's all.

April 18, 1945

Paris

I shocked the chambermaid. Or whatever they are called in France! I forgot to hang the DO NOT DISTURB sign on the door—*NE PAS DÉRANGER*—and she came in a while ago to make the bed and clean the bathroom. I was sitting at the little vanity table, which I'd pulled over so it is in front of the big window, and I was writing with not a stitch on. I did have that incredible silk bedspread thing wrapped around me, but it slipped right off when I turned around to see who had come in.

Oh, God, we were both SO EMBARRASSED. I look like a corpse. The Red Cross did a good job of delousing me and getting the scabies under control, but you can still see the rashes all over my breasts and arms, and if those scales and Bob Ernst's metric conversion are right, I have lost 45 pounds in the last seven months. (Amazing, because I am still heavier than Irina, who is taller than me. But she was there longer.) I saw myself in the mirror over the dresser when I was taking my clothes off yesterday, and I am so horrible I had to cover the stupid mirror with a sheet so I don't scare myself by accident.

"Come back! Come back!" I mewed pathetically after the chambermaid as she backed out—I got the right word in French but used the familiar form by accident because we did all winter ("*Reviens!*")—trying to pull the bedspread up and to remember how to say "Don't go" politely. She left anyway, shutting the door softly behind her, and I put my head down on the table and cried. I am *so lonely*. I should get dressed and go back to the embassy and see if I can find some way to get back to the Swedish Red Cross people. But I don't even know their unit name or number or where they were headed next. "Sweden" is not very specific.

The chambermaid came back ten minutes later with coffee and rolls for me on a silver tray. Real coffee. She plunked it down on the vanity table and told me her name and rushed away to make the bed.

Her name is Fernande. She doesn't speak English. She is

busy with the bed now—she has even brought up a new spread so I can stay wrapped in this one. She hasn't started on the bathroom and *that* will take her some time, because the one thing I did do last night was take a two-hour bath in that gigantic tub. The only reason I didn't make it last longer is because they shut the hot water off at nine p.m. I am going to write as fast as I can while she's here. I've been putting off remembering what that night on the ground was like, and I don't want to think about it when I'm by myself.

They let me use the pilots' restroom at Neubrandenburg also, but they took away all my pilot's gear except my flight bag. Womelsdorff turned me over to a grouchy mechanic, who took me on the back of his motorbike to this so-called women's prison. There *is* a women's prison camp outside Neubrandenburg—it is one of the Ravensbrück satellite camps. But you were supposed to be processed through the main Camp first. I was in the wrong place, I wasn't on their radar, and they didn't know what to do with me when the mechanic turned me over to them.

I remember standing uncomfortably in a drab office somewhere, standing very straight and trying to look more official than I felt—I'd even slapped my uniform cap back on when I handed them my papers. They passed my papers around and argued for half an hour while I just stood there waiting. Then, as it was getting dark, they took me outside at gunpoint and locked me in the back of an empty armored truck. I had no idea I was in the wrong place—I had no idea why they'd put me in the truck (for a few horrible minutes I thought they were just going to shoot me right there). I didn't understand anything anyone said. I know *now* what was going on—I know that the truck was just an empty transport and was returning to Ravensbrück the next day for another load of prisoners, and that they were going to drop me off before loading up again.

But that night—

Oh, God, that truck smelled *so horrible*. If there is a smell that goes with fear and despair, it is like that—sweat and dirty underpants and pee. I was already retching as they slammed the

doors shut on me, and for a long time I just stood in the middle of the truck, hugging myself and gagging.

There was no light. I braced myself in the dark because I thought they were going to take me somewhere any minute, and the truck would lurch into action and I'd fall over and have to touch whatever was on the evil floor. But nothing happened. Then I tried to get out, struggling with the doors until all my nails were broken—the sheets of metal interlocked and there wasn't even a crack to feel air through. Near the front of the truck there were slatted air vents high up in the walls, but even if I'd been able to get the slats out, the opening was smaller than my head. Eventually I was so tired that I gritted my teeth and leaned in the corner below one of the air vents, where two walls propped me so I could still stand up. Then later I had to sit down.

Fernande is still here. She's in the bathroom now. I couldn't write about this if I was alone.

I took off my flying jacket and tucked up the edges carefully, so that only the leather of the back was touching the floor, and sat on that. It wasn't very cold yet—still early September.

After a while I opened up my flight bag to count the papers that I'd handed over earlier and then shoved back in without looking—checking to feel that I still had my precious official letter of recommendation from the Luftwaffe, with its stamps and signatures—and beneath the pile of papers I found, mysteriously, two of my confiscated Hershey bars.

I am sure that Womelsdorff put them there.

I was starved enough to eat one, even in the grim stench of the transport truck—I didn't dare eat both, because I didn't know how long I'd be there. Finally I curled in my supportive corner as tightly as I could on the protective island of my flying jacket. I buried my nose in the silver paper that the chocolate had been wrapped in, sucking in the distant smell of Hershey and home to mask the stink, and managed to go to sleep.

I got woken up by the engine starting. Through the air vents high in the walls I could see that it was light. No one looked

inside to see if I was even alive—I have always thought the truck driver didn't actually know I was there.

We drove for about an hour and I couldn't even tell what direction we were heading or how fast we were going. After the truck parked and the engine stopped, I sat in the dark for *another* hour. I didn't know it, but the truck had gone through the gate. I was already inside.

I ate the last chocolate bar. We'd both traveled from the same place, me and that Hershey bar—I thought how incredible it was that we both ended up here together. I heard long, slow trains steaming and clunking past a short distance away, a comforting sound, like the freight line that goes past the Lake at Conewago Grove. I heard other trucks coming and going, and orders shouted in German. I heard the siren and nearly jumped out of my skin.

We called it "The Screamer." The first time I heard it I thought there must be an air raid going on. I scrunched myself up in a ball with my arms over my head—of course, nothing happened. The next thing I heard, twenty minutes later, was the sound of hundreds of feet shuffling along at a weary jog and a lot of shouting and dogs barking. I felt my way to the doors to try again to find a crack, to see out.

Then someone opened the doors. I clapped my hands over my eyes and stood teetering on the edge of the truck floor, completely blinded by sunny September brilliance. They didn't give me five seconds. I hadn't even opened my eyes before someone grabbed my skirt and yanked me off balance, and I crashed full length onto the cindered road surface. The fall took the skin right off both my knees and off the heels of both hands, too. I rolled over and sat up, furious and stunned, rubbing my eyes with shaking, bloody hands. Within seconds I was surrounded by half a dozen frantic German shepherds straining at the end of their leashes, all barking their heads off while half a dozen voices behind them barked equally vicious and completely incomprehensible orders over my head.

I just cowered.

Finally, since obviously I wasn't going to obey an order I didn't have a hope of understanding, someone grabbed me by the back of my collar and hauled me to my feet. I ended up

being dragged to stand in the back of a long line of women who all looked as bewildered and stunned as I was. They seemed to be civilians, most of them carrying small bags and suitcases. There must have been nearly four hundred of us—all packed five to a row, and I was the last one in the last row.

You know how you look around a new place to see what it's like? I didn't do that right away, because my hands and knees were so sore. I bent down to look at my knees and cursed, "*Gosh darn it!*" when I saw the humongous bloody holes in my stockings. "Gosh darn it, these are *nylon!*"

You know, it almost makes me laugh to write about it. What was the first thing you worried about when you found yourself a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp, Rosie? Gosh darn it, holes in my nylon hose!

One of the guards yanked me upright again, by my hair this time, and that is when I lost my cap, because they would not let me pick it up. I never saw it again.

We stood there until after it got dark.

I think it must have been six or seven hours. They weren't punishing us that first day; I think they were just disorganized and there wasn't any other place to put us yet. So we had to stand there, trying not to die of fear or boredom. But it was the first time. That made it harder.

This is what I thought about while I waited:

The walls. Twenty feet high and fenced with electric wire and skull-and-crossbones warning signs. There were a lot of empty trucks parked around us, but you could see the walls behind them. I still hadn't figured out I was *inside* these walls—it was because I'd been locked blindly in the truck when I came through the gate. I kept looking at the walls and thinking, Gosh, I hope I don't end up in *there*, whatever it is. Dreading that I probably would, and blissfully unaware that I already *was*.

The sky. It was the most pure, beautiful blue September sky I think I have ever seen, with frothy clouds floating in it lazily like whipped cream in an ice-cream soda at the Hide-a-way Fountain in Conewago Grove. We stood there so long you could pick out a single cloud and watch it travel right from one side of the sky to the other—and then do it again. And again. You

could see a ridge of pine trees behind one of the walls, too, but the trees just stood there—they were boring to watch. The sky changed.

And then the women who were going to Neubrandenburg came marching past us, five by five by five, to get into the row of waiting trucks.

Those two hundred women had all been turned into drones. They were like rows of plastic dolls. They all wore tattered, grubby dresses that didn't fit (I don't think any one of the forty or fifty thousand people in that whole damn Camp had a dress that fit her)—and there were great big crosses cut out of the fabric across the front and back of their chests and filled in with some contrasting color. They weren't prison uniforms, but they looked like prison uniforms anyway. But the absolutely nightmare thing about these women was that none of them had any hair. We watched and stared as these scruffy, bald zombies were herded into the waiting trucks, packed so close they couldn't even sit down—now I knew why that truck smelled the way it did.

Suddenly, at exactly the same moment, me and the girl next to me turned to stare at each other instead of at the awful robot women. We were looking at each other's hair and thinking the same thing.

After that, we stopped watching the other prisoners climbing into the trucks. We just stared at the long hair of the woman in front of us, thick and brown and uncombed, and full of tangled curls, like mine.

It got hot. By midafternoon, my blouse was sticking to my back, but the guards kept patrolling up and down the lines and whacking people who tried to sit down or talk, and I didn't dare to try to take my tunic off. I hadn't had anything to drink or been to the toilet since I landed in Neubrandenburg the day before, and I'd eaten only chocolate since then; pretty soon I became consumed by thirst more than anything else. In my wildest nightmares I'd never imagined such simple torture—just to have to stand in one place forever and ever.

I don't remember being scared anymore at that point. I was

just sick of standing there and desperate for a glass of water.

Late in the afternoon the girl standing next to me whispered something without turning her head.

“*Vous êtes un pilote?*”—You’re a pilot?

I didn’t answer for a long time, checking around us for guards and guard dogs without moving my head. Then, “*Oui*,” I answered, also in a whisper. Yes.

I stole a glance at her. She was short and pretty, with untidy gold bangs that got in her eyes, and a long, shiny scar down one side of her face. This was the first conversation I ever had with a French person in real life who wasn’t my French teacher—and also it was the first time I understood anything since Womelsdorff handed me over to the guy with the motorbike the day before. I had a pretty good idea what would happen if anyone noticed us whispering. But it was such a relief to be able to talk to someone.

She whispered, “*Vous êtes anglaise?*” Are you English?

“*Américaine.*”

“What are you doing here?” she asked in French.

“*Je ne sais pas*,” I hissed. “I don’t know. You?”

“We all come from different prisons,” she told me.

“Arrested for Resistance activity—most of us are *Résistantes*. I’ve been in prison for nine months.”

I was confused, because if she’d already been in prison for nearly a year, why was she here now?

“Where are we?”

She shrugged. “Probably Ravensbrück. It’s their big women’s concentration camp. They move us all the time—away from the Allied armies as they advance. I was in prison in Paris until May, then moved to Frankfurt, then to Berlin. Now here.”

Her name was Elodie Fabert.

You know, *concentration camp* translates pretty clearly in French—even in German. *Camp de concentration*.

Konzentrationslager. But even though I knew what the words meant, it didn’t mean anything then. Not really. The name of the place didn’t mean anything to me. Over the heads of the four hundred Frenchwomen ahead of me I stared at the high

concrete walls and the miles of electrified barbed wire, and I clung to my flight bag with its official Luftwaffe letter in it. The girl next to me had already been in prison for nine months and she obviously survived it. Our troops were practically over the Siegfried Line. It wouldn't be for long. I wouldn't cause trouble. I would be all right. If they ever let us sit down and have a drink, I would be all right.

The chambermaid has left. It's okay—it was just being alone in the truck I didn't like remembering by myself. Reading it over, I noticed that I didn't actually write down what I kept thinking then: *What if no one ever opens that door?* I'm done with it now—dry words on a page. The reality was much worse.

Also, I didn't write that most of the SS people guarding us were women, too. When I read over the part about being dragged out of the truck and into line, it sounded like it was a man doing it, taking advantage of a poor, dazed female. But it wasn't—it was a girl not much older than me and a couple of inches shorter. She probably wasn't any stronger, either. She was just *meaner*.

I asked Fernande to ask someone to send me some more ink. I know I won't ever catch up with that Red Cross unit. Now that I've glided down, I haven't got enough lift to get airborne again. I don't have any clothes, and I still have this exhausting, rib-cracking cough. If I stand looking out the window for more than ten minutes, I get so tired I have to sit down. Out of an entire hotel menu, I can't keep down anything more exciting than unsweetened rice pudding or boiled macaroni with nothing on it. I *want* to go back out there. But I just can't do anything more energetic than write or sleep, and even sleeping is exhausting. I tried to take a nap and dreamed I was sleeping alone in our barrack, with an icy wind howling through the broken windows, and everybody else had been gassed.

Which is probably a nightmare based on the fact that I *am* alone, and it's my own fault. All I can do is pray Irina takes care of our stubborn little Róża. How how *how* did I lose them *both*, when we were already *out*?

April 19, 1945

Paris

When the six p.m. siren let out its piercing howl, we nearly jumped out of our skin.

We had all fallen into a stupor of exhaustion and misery, and you could see a ripple of attention race through our ranks as the noise shocked us wide awake. Not long after that, they finally fed us. They did it outside, right where we were standing—like CAMP, hah. First they let us help ourselves to water from a row of spigots by the main gate, after about a year of standing in line to get there, and then they brought out two big oil drums of soup. It was absolutely chaotic—seemed chaotic, anyway, the first time, four hundred of us trying to get at two pots all at once. We had about one bowl between four of us to take turns with, which they took away again when we were done, since we hadn't yet been issued *official* bowls of our own. You had to carry your bowl around with you all the time in a little bag or someone would steal it and then you wouldn't get any soup. No bowl, no soup. Of all the unbelievable things about Ravensbrück, I think the Administration and Politics of Bowls must have been the battiest.

Now it just seems incredible that we got something to eat that day. We all got some soup, and we all got a piece of bread, and we ate it standing up. I ate mine, but I don't remember anything about it. I don't remember what the soup was—I mean, you never really knew what it was, but I don't remember it being the worst soup I'd ever eaten. I do remember that I couldn't eat the biggest chunks of whatever mystery root vegetable was in it, because they were completely raw. Inside a month I wouldn't care, but what did I know at that point?

What I remember *most* about that first meal there are the filthy, crawling skeletal beggars who fought over the raw chunks of potato or turnip or whatever it was in the soup that I couldn't make myself eat. There was a Camp word for those beggars, which I never did figure out how to say or spell, because it sounds so much to me like *schmootzich*—Mother's

nasty way of describing a girl who doesn't take care of herself. It's Pennsylvania Dutch for "filthy greasy."

They took any food you gave them. The first day, because I was still ignorant enough to be picky about what I ate, I tried to hand over my leftover chunks of raw vegetable to one of these desperate people. In seconds I was being clawed at by ten skeletal hands, grabbing at me anywhere they could to try to get in on the handout—five crawling creatures who had once been women snatching at my skirt, my arms, my hair. One of the guards had to beat them off. It left me shaking with shock. I never dared that kind of charity again.

You could drop a bread crust on the ground and the *schmootzichs* would fight over it. If you dropped a bread crust and stepped on it, or a guard spat on it, they still fought over it. They were like *seagulls*. Like seagulls going after garbage. They were so far from being human that at first it didn't even occur to me they could be fellow prisoners—I thought they must be hoboes who'd crawled in off the train tracks. *God knows what I thought!* Your brain does amazing acrobatics when it doesn't want to believe something.

After we ate, the guards pointed us in the direction of a ditch we could use for a latrine. I kept telling myself, it's like *camp*. It's a camp; I'm at camp.

God knows what I thought I was telling myself.

We got herded into a harshly lit factory shed to be registered and examined and given prison clothes. Elodie and I were somehow always the last in line, and by the time our turn came for *anything* we got the absolute worst of it. But on the other hand, by the time you'd stood in line for an hour or three or four, you knew what was going on. We were able to do a lot more whispering in the administration building than we'd been able to do standing under guard all afternoon, and most information was highly refined by the time it reached me and Elodie. We knew before we got to the line of desks where they processed us that, like all new prisoners, we were in "quarantine"—being "decontaminated" to prevent the spread of typhoid. That sounded plausible, and a good thing, but it was

clearly a complete joke—the *schmootzichs* had had their filthy oozing hands all over us.

My ATA pilot's uniform was like a rallying flag. Everybody was ravenously starved for encouraging news from the Front, and only one day ago I'd been a free woman flying over a free Paris. "Caen is ours," I whispered. "And Brussels and Antwerp, and Le Havre just yesterday! I heard before I took off! We're past Reims in France now. We've got most of France and a big part of Belgium. The push is north to Holland and west to the German border. We haven't got all the French ports—we're still fighting for Boulogne, but it'll be any day. And the Luftwaffe—"

Womelsdorff had been cursing his own military for wasting resources.

"They've got spectacular new jets, but no fuel."

People relayed the news to one another in nearly silent whispers. The guards wouldn't let us talk, but they couldn't keep their eyes on all four hundred of us at once. The news flew around the hall.

Other prisoners were already packing everybody's things up and carting them away to be sorted by the time I had to dump out my flight bag on one of the dozens of administrators' desks lined up across the shed. I bit my lip, my stomach churning with worry while the administrator squinted at my papers, because I knew they were going to keep my passport and Luftwaffe letter of reference and leave me without any ID except for whatever they assigned me.

Finally the administrator called someone else over—both of them SS guards, both of them women, maybe five years older than me. They talked to each other in German, studying my American passport. One of them rolled her eyes at the other and made a face. She'd noticed my middle name—Rose Moyer Justice. The other glanced at me, pointed at her friend, and told me drily, "*Das ist Effi Moyer.*"

Effi Moyer wasn't happy about it at all. She grabbed hold of the lapel of my tunic and gave it a demanding yank. I took the tunic off and handed it to her. She started to go through my pockets with brisk efficiency and found the wrappers from my chocolate bars.

I'd folded the silver foil and brown paper very carefully, wrapped it in my rose hanky from Aunt Rainy, and pushed it deep into the corner of my tunic pocket. I wanted to keep it because it smelled so overwhelmingly of Pennsylvania, of home, of flying over Hershey and the fields of Jericho County.

When Effi Moyer found the brown-and-silver paper folded up so carefully, she passed it to her friend—they both unfolded the scraps with deep and interested suspicion, as though they expected lumps of gold to drop out. Effi held the silver foil up to her nose exactly the way I'd done in the truck the night before and took a deep breath.

"*Schokolade*," she said, and passed the empty candy wrapper to her colleague, who also took a deep breath.

They made a fierce, disappointing search through the rest of my pockets and checked my bag again, and then they divided up the paper between them—each of them got one full wrapper.

I watched the whole performance biting my lip, trying to kill another terrible, *terrible* urge to laugh. And also feeling a new kind of fear taking hold of my stomach and tying it in knots. These were the *prison guards* confiscating my empty candy bar wrappers as if they were hundred-dollar bills. If that's how hard up the *guards* were...

Effi tossed my tunic to the woman standing a couple of desks down from her, and it got lost in the pile of hundreds of other abandoned jackets and blouses and skirts. Then I had to take off the rest of my clothes. It wouldn't have been so bad if you didn't have to do it in front of men, too—SS officers and guards who were directing and pushing people and just standing around watching. But everyone else had already had to strip. I was the last.

There was a little office room like a clinic where you had to sit on a table while a couple of people in rubber gloves put you through an unspeakable body search with tongue depressors and a flashlight. When they were done with the search, Effi barked an order at the doctors or whatever they were, and I had to sit backward on a chair (holding on to the back of it) while they sheared my hair off. They really did *shear* it—with scissors up against my scalp, not close enough to my head to count as shaving it off, but so close there was nothing left. If I were

going to do that to anyone, I'd time it that way, too—addle her brain with shame and discomfort and then quickly get her hair before she came to her senses. The shock of losing my hair didn't hit me till later. The tongue depressors and flashlights seemed much more terrible at the time—even though that only lasted a couple of minutes, and I was stuck with my hair. Without it, I mean.

Finally I got smacked on my bare backside with someone's clipboard because I hesitated going into the slimy, dark shower room.

Nothing that happened to me that day made me cry. Some of it scared me, but most of it just made me SO MAD.

I'd lost Elodie. The room with the showers was badly lit and murky with mildew—it reminded me of the abandoned bathhouse by the old pool at Conewago Park that they haven't used since before the Great War. Me and the other summer kids used to explore all the old park buildings, but not the bathhouse—it was just too creepy. Here in Ravensbrück, I hesitated in the doorway, smarting but unable to take another step over the slimy red clay tiles toward those black trickling overhead spigots and the dozens of white, skinny, bald women shivering beneath them.

“La pilote américaine! Mon amie américaine!”

“Ici!” I yelled. “Here!”

Elodie and I got slapped simultaneously on opposite sides of the shower room. But I knew where she was now, and we managed to get back together.

The guards were trying hard to get everybody done with—it was dark, it was late, they were sick of us—and finally they shoved a couple of prison dresses at Elodie and me, and we had to put them on while we were still wet. Her dress came down to her ankles and mine was too tight. Someone threw shoes at us. Between us there was one each that fit—none of them matched. No stockings, no bra, no underwear of any kind.

Back in the long factory room with the prison dresses sticking to our wet backs, we had to pick up patches with our prisoner numbers on them, along with another patch that was supposed to show what kind of prisoner you were—all red

triangles for us, which meant we were political prisoners. Then we had to learn to say our numbers in German. I remembered my number—that wasn't the trouble. After all, when I was two, Grampa taught me how to count to twenty in Dutch, or Low German, or whatever it really is. The trouble was that when Effi Moyer tried to teach me how to say my number, I tried to tell her I wasn't French.

*“Französisch politischer Häftling
Einundfünfzigtausendvierhundertachtundneunzig,”* she prompted me. French Political Prisoner 51498.

Remembering what the Luftwaffe pilots had called me when they were arguing over my papers in Mannheim, I said to Effi, *“Ich bin Amerikanerin.”* I pointed to the others and pointed to myself and shook my head. “I’m not French. *Amerikanerin.*”

Effi looked me in the eye with a face full of disdain and irritation and said, *“Französisch politischer Häftling
Einundfünfzigtausendvierhundertachtundneunzig”*—and honestly my German has not improved very much, but I *know* that is what she said because my name was *Französisch politischer Häftling 51498* for six months.

I repeated the numbers. But not the “French Political Prisoner” part, because I wasn't French. I was *trying* to behave myself. Effi just glared at me and started to put away the ledgers, ignoring me, and I turned away to find Elodie waiting for me with her mouth twisted into a sort of imitation of a grin. She tossed back the golden bangs—she'd managed to keep her hair, presumably because she was such an Aryan blonde—and gestured quickly at our badly fitting dresses with one finger. *Swap you.*

We started to strip the dresses off again, right there. We didn't think anyone would care, because everyone ahead of us was being made to strip again so we could sew the red patches and our prisoner numbers onto our sleeves. But I hadn't counted on Effi Moyer. She'd *noticed* me. I was the embarrassing prisoner who shared her name, the one who'd failed to save her a Hershey bar, the one who'd argued with her about being American.

Effi saw me and Elodie about to swap our dresses, and she came marching over to us and grabbed them away from us.

Then she grabbed Elodie by her hair, close to her scalp, and dragged her over to sit down on the floor right next to the desk. Effi jerked one arm fiercely in my direction to tell me to follow Elodie—she wanted to keep an eye on us both as we sewed on our patches.

Elodie suddenly seemed totally cowed. Stark naked, she hunched over the dress, covering her lap with it; her shoulders shook a little as if she were sobbing. She didn't make a sound, though. I sat next to her biting my lip, helpless with feeling so humiliated and *so mad*. We had to wait for someone to pass us a needle, and when we got one Elodie dropped it. Then she couldn't find the patch with her number on it after she'd threaded the needle. We scrambled around hunting for it, and both of us got whacked over the head with one of Effi Moyer's clipboards. Then, when it was my turn to use the needle, I couldn't find *my* number.

Elodie had it. She handed me the patch quietly, and her mouth twisted in a quick little grin. The scar on the side of her face made her pretty smile lopsided.

It wasn't till I was sewing it on my sleeve that I realized she'd swapped our numbers. All the shuffling around had all been a show to distract Effi Moyer from Elodie's sleight of hand. She'd sewn my 51498 onto the sleeve of her pale blue shirtwaisted sailor dress with the too-long skirt that came down to her ankles, its big collar ripped off so that it wouldn't hide the contrasting prison X across the front and back of the bodice. And now I sewed Elodie's 51497 onto my too-tight brown gingham. Effi Moyer had been so busy making sure we put on the dumb dresses we'd been "issued" with, she hadn't paid any attention to the numbers we'd sewn on the dresses.

We put our badly fitting clothes back on, wearing each other's numbers, and lined up in front of the quarantine block to be counted.

The siren for the nine o'clock roll call had come and gone, and thousands of other prisoners had already gone to bed, but for us it was our first real roll call—*Zählappell*—outside beneath the glaring electric lights, the long shadows of the dogs and the infinite rows of barbed wire making eerie pictures on the high concrete walls. It seemed to take forever. We stood there until

after they turned the streetlights out, the SS guards shining flashlights in our faces and making sure we didn't try to sit down.

Elodie and I were still the last two in our group, so by the time they got to us, the guards were utterly fed up with everybody and ready to go to bed, too, and here we were, the last two "French" women with our numbers the wrong way around.

"Fabert, *Einundfünfzigtausendvierhundertsiebenundneunzig!* Justice, *Einundfünfzigtausendvierhundertachtundneunzig!*"—
Fabert, 51497! Justice, 51498! Somebody prodded Elodie's sleeve with a club.

"No, I'm Rose Justice!"

Two guards used their clubs to guide us out of line while a third stood hanging on for dear life to one of the awful German shepherds, and a fourth stood glaring down at her clipboard with its endless list of names, flashlight tucked under her arm and pencil in the other hand. Her hair was hanging in her eyes, and she looked incredibly grouchy. She didn't watch us at all. She couldn't have cared less what was going on. She was just waiting to get the stupid numbers to come out right.

They made us strip naked again.

They gave me three cracking truncheon wallops: in the stomach and on the small of my back and over my shoulders—the first blow made me bend over and the second knocked me to my knees, leaving my back wide open for the third. While I crouched there, gasping and reeling, they got out those dreaded shears and cut all of Elodie's golden hair off. I didn't have any hair to cut off, so I got beaten up instead.

When they'd finished battering and defacing us, one of them took Elodie's dress with my number on it and threw it at me, and then took my dress with Elodie's number on it and threw it at her. They made us get dressed again. And then they shoved us back in line and checked our numbers off the list—
Fabert, 51497; Justice, 51498.

Elodie whispered, "*La victoire!*" Victory!

I was black and blue for a week, and Elodie had had to stand stark naked in the *Lagerstrasse*, the main Camp street, in

the middle of the night and get her hair sheared off. But she was right—we'd beaten Effi Moyer. We were wearing the dresses that fit us, and our own numbers.

You know, if it had just gone on like that for six months, maybe it wouldn't have been so bad.

I hadn't seen *evil*. Or if I had, I didn't recognize it yet. I didn't realize they'd *made* the *schmootzichs*. All I'd seen in the guards were bad tempers and meanness. But not evil. Not horror. Not really. Only...you know, they were always so random about dealing out their meanness. I think the randomness should have tipped me off. It was *dark* when they beat me up and cut off Elodie's hair that night. They didn't even have the benefit of much of an audience. It wasn't humiliating; it was just vicious.

The randomness has left its mark. I am scared of anything arbitrary now—of anything that happens suddenly. I am scared of the telephone ringing. It rang this morning, when the embassy called to see if I was okay. I am scared of loud noises in the street. I am scared of dogs, and of talking to people for the first time. It is not a normal kind of being scared—the telephone made me burst into tears. A horse-drawn cart clattering by made me crouch behind the vanity table. It took me about an hour to get the courage to go into the embassy the other day—I just stood there against the wall outside the gate watching everybody else go in and out. I was scared of Fernande the first time she showed up.

I am not scared of this room, but I feel like a flea in a jewelry box. And I am utterly lost in the beautiful double bed, that's for sure.

The bunks in quarantine Block 8 were triple-deckers, bare boards two planks wide, one bug-infested straw mat about half an inch thick with a couple of grubby cotton blankets between four of us. It was a 100 percent improvement over where I'd slept the night before. Elodie and I clung to each other because it was the only way to avoid falling out. We were on a top tier, under the wooden roof and above the windows. I was hungry but not yet starving; my knees, shoulders, ribs, and back were incredibly sore; and I was exhausted but wide awake. I still wasn't really *scared*. I was just seething. So angry! This stupid

fight over the dresses. I could have understood if they had a prison uniform they wanted us all to wear. They used to have one, ugly gray sacks with blue stripes—a lot of the women who'd been there awhile still wore them. If we'd all been wearing the same ugly uniform, I'd have understood. But why should we have to swap our own perfectly decent clothes for someone else's that didn't fit? What was the SS going to do with a hand-me-down Air Transport Auxiliary uniform? I'd have been perfectly happy to let them sew a big X across my uniform if only they'd let me wear it. Or—not happy. But willing.

And our hair. Some of the girls were really upset about it. A couple of them, just after, didn't even try to cover up their privates when the guards grinned at them—they covered up their bald heads, as if this were the most shameful and embarrassing thing that had ever been done to them. I wasn't upset. I was *angry*, as mad as I was about everything else. There was one spiky patch on the side of my head where they didn't really cut it close enough. They cut it too close to Elodie's scalp, in the dark, and she had another nice, long, oozy red scrape to match the scar along her jaw.

What will Nick think when he sees me? I suddenly wondered. Nick *loves* my hair. Maybe it will grow out by the time I see him again. Oh, please let it grow out a *little* bit.

Down at the bottom of the bunk, my toes were still shiny with cherry-red nail varnish, which I'd put on for my last date with Nick. I noticed them in the shower.

Nobody said anything in the dark, but it wasn't silent. People rutched around trying to get comfortable, growling at each other, sighing, coughing, sobbing. I could hear the distant hum of generators or something—of course some of the workshops kept going all night, though I didn't know that then.

Suddenly, on the other side of the thin wooden barracks, an anonymous voice yelled out, "*Vive la France!*"

Instantly there was dead silence.

We were all frozen, holding our breaths, waiting for the lights to snap back on and the dogs to come back.

But nothing happened, and after another tense moment, half a dozen other anonymous voices answered in defiance:

“Vive la France! VIVE LA FRANCE!”

Then another voice called out fiercely, in English, *“God bless America!”*

It wasn't me. It wasn't Elodie. I don't know who it was. But it was a battle cry. We were still at war and we were *soldiers* and we were *Allies*.

After that, everybody settled down.

It happened every single night I was in quarantine in Block 8. Last thing every night, some unseen voice would yell into the dark, *“Vive la France!”* and someone else would answer, *“God bless America!”*

It was never me. I was never brave enough. My accent would have given me away.

But it was brave of the others to do it for me.

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April 20, 1945

Paris

The telephone rang again. I burst into tears again. But it just kept on ringing and ringing. They know I am here, and finally I thought that if I *didn't* answer it, they'd send someone up to make sure I wasn't drowned in the tub or something, and it would be worse having to open the door to a French bellhop—especially since I still haven't got dressed—than it would be talking on the phone to the English-speaking switchboard operator. So I answered and said “Hello” in my best imitation of Before-Ravensbrück-Rose-Justice.

It was Mother.

For a long time after we were connected, she just kept calling, “Rosie? Rosie?” as if she were hunting for me in the Conewago woods, and I was so dumbstruck to hear her voice that I didn't answer at first, which didn't help. Then, believe it or not, I did not burst into tears again. I just said, “Hello, Mother,” very calmly, and lied and lied and lied.

I've been in a prison camp in Germany. Yes, a political prisoner. I landed in the wrong place and they wouldn't let me go back over the front lines. Yes, I'm okay. Uncle Roger has me staying in the Paris Ritz!

I talked about the wonderful silk quilt thing and the beautiful, big window and the ridiculous gigantic tub and room service.

“Didn't the Nazis take over the Ritz in Paris?”

“Yes, that's why it's in such beautiful condition! And”—I could talk about this safely, with real enthusiasm—“the Germans didn't bomb Paris at all. The German commander in charge of Paris was supposed to pound the city to pieces before he surrendered, and he refused to do it. Berlin told him to blow up all the monuments—the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame Cathedral and the Arc de Triomphe—and he *didn't*. And when I brought Uncle Roger to France last summer, I flew over the whole of the city and it was *just beautiful*.”

Mother sighed.

“Oh, *Rosie*. It is *so good* to hear your voice.”

She was crying—not me. I had fooled her.

She said, “I thought—we just thought you must have been shot down, of course. It seemed like the only thing that could have happened. Although—have you heard what they’re finding now? There are some terrible stories. Have you heard about these concentration camps they say they’re liberating? The Red Cross keeps coming up with people who say they’ve been freed from these awful places. We don’t believe any of it for a second—those Jewish women who said they’d been—”

I didn’t hear what happened or didn’t happen to the Jewish women, because I held the receiver at arm’s length until the distant, transatlantic twitter of Mother’s voice went anxious and I could tell she was calling my name again.

I put the phone back to my ear.

“Hi, Mom.”

“Oh!” she gasped in relief. “I thought I’d lost you.”

Every spring, Mother makes us wash the house—actually hose down and scrub the outside of our house. She is probably doing it *now*, getting excited about me coming home. Our house is brick and is about fifty years old. There is a wide front porch with columns, and Daddy always gets up on the porch roof to do the second floor and the bedroom windows. Mother watches critically and directs everything from the front yard. I run back and forth from the kitchen, delivering buckets of warm, soapy water for Daddy; Karl and Kurt play with the hose until it’s time to rinse all the soap off.

Afterward, the porch smells of pine soap and the windows are so clean they are just reflective slabs of blue sky.

How can I ever tell Mother about the filth? It wasn’t plain old dirt. Dirt’s easy to get rid of—you can rinse it away. It doesn’t hurt you. The linoleum of our kitchen floor gets scrubbed with Clorox every two weeks. Mother would pick up a ball of pie dough off the kitchen linoleum if she dropped it, and shrug and slap it down on the pastry cloth on the dough tray,

and laugh. “We’re all going to eat a peck of dirt before we die.”

I’m not talking about dirt. I’m not talking about a crumb of dust or a dog hair in the piecrust. I’m talking about more than fifty thousand women locked inside a cinder-and-concrete prison half a mile wide and a quarter of a mile across with no toilets. When I got there, there were three toilets that still worked in Block 8, although they were pretty horrible. There were four hundred of us using them and only one was still working by the time they sent me to the Siemens factory three weeks later or whatever it was. Most of us used the ditch outside.

By the middle of January even the ditches were full. For the last couple of months we went against the wall outside the building we lived in. There wasn’t anyplace else to go, and most of us had dysentery or typhoid. You’d have to let it run down your legs if you needed to go during a roll call. How can I ever tell Mother? How can I *ever* tell her about the *filth* I have lived in all of last fall and winter and half this spring?

I can’t tell her. I’ll never tell her.

After one night in quarantine, we had so many fleabites it is a miracle we didn’t all end up with bubonic plague. During that first four thirty a.m. roll call, all I wanted to do was scratch until I’d peeled my entire skin off. Why do they go for your ankles, which are the hardest part of your body to reach when you’re pretending to stand at attention? Are fleas in league with the SS?

Quarantine was just about bearable. You knew it wouldn’t last. Three weeks of Block 8, of overflowing toilets and fleas and eye-crossing boredom during the day, sitting there waiting for the quarantine to finish and not being allowed to talk to anybody, and then we would all get to move on.

If I’d known I’d never see Elodie again when it was done, I might not have been in such a rush to get it over with. I feel like I squandered my three weeks with Elodie by wasting the whole time eagerly looking ahead to some mythic improvement that never actually happened. But you can’t blame us for *hoping*, can you? Doesn’t hope keep you going? We’d stand in line

swapping camp songs in French and English under our breath, and when we discovered we knew some of the same tunes, “Tallis Canon” and “By the Light of the Moon,” our delight wasn’t desperate—it was *real*. We should have had a chance to be *friends*.

Elodie was a natural organizer. I don’t mean that in the normal English-language sense of people who can arrange things. I mean it in the Camp sense of magically being able to get hold of miraculous, hard-to-find, forbidden items like woolen scarves and soap and paper and cigarettes. She pulled stuff out of nowhere like a magician. She bartered with the *schmootzichs*. She bartered with the *guards*, and she had to get someone to translate for her when she did that. I watched her sometimes, trying to figure out how she did it, like it was a knack you could pick up. And it is, of course, but it came naturally to Elodie.

She got us toothbrushes and soap, needle and thread, a collection of pencil stubs, a razor to sharpen them with. Underpants for me and socks to line her own mismatched shoes and a button to close the gap at the side of the dress she’d swapped with me. She organized *sanitary pads* for me. Most of the other people in our block didn’t need them—they’d been in prison so long that malnourishment and fatigue and, I guess, just living with such an intensity of fear and distress had temporarily shut them down. I shut down eventually, too, thank God. But when I first started my period halfway through quarantine, Elodie was the one who scavenged bits of cotton blanket and jute ripped from the edges of the straw mattresses. With half a steel sewing-machine needle and thread unraveled from the ragged edge where the collar was missing on my own dress, we whipped together a small collection of primitive pads, uncomfortable but effective.

Elodie wasn’t a leader. She’d been a courier in the French Resistance, delivering messages, doing as she was told. She was just really sneaky. She was the one who figured out that prisoners from other countries had a letter in their triangular ID patch showing what country they were from—Polish prisoners had a black *P* in their patches, Czechs a *T* for “Czech” in German. The French patches were blank—special humiliation

for the French. So Elodie embroidered an *F* in her own red triangle. And *USA* in mine.

More dry words on a page. I wish I could capture *Elodie*, make her come alive again—small, scarred, sneaky, singing.

When I think of her—when I *picture* her—I picture her with her gold bangs sticking to her forehead in the September sun on that first afternoon, though I don't know if her hair ever grew back before they gassed her. Of course I didn't see her go—Irina told me. Elodie shouting with Micheline and Karolina from the back of the crammed truck—"TELL THE WORLD"—and I picture Elodie the way she looked the day I met her. They yelled in French and in Polish, English, and German. "TELL THE WORLD! TELL THE WORLD! *TELL THE WORLD!*"

Micheline Karolina Elodie Zofia Veronica Rozalia Genca Maria Alfreda Apolonia Kazimiera Anna Zosia Aniela—

So many dead. There were probably over thirty thousand living women in Ravensbrück when I got there and nearly sixty thousand or more by the time I left, so who knows how many thousands died in between? And how many died *before* I got there and *after* I left? How many in other camps?

I *will* tell the world.

Mother said she doesn't believe it.

I WILL TELL THE WORLD.

I say that so fiercely. I say it with such conviction, such determined anger. But I couldn't even tell Mother, could I? A few pages ago, I vowed I *wouldn't* tell Mother. How can I possibly tell the world?

I have to. This is a beginning. If I write it all down, later it can turn into a plan.

April 21, 1945

Paris

When my quarantine was finished, they sent me over to the Siemens factory. They just hauled me out of my row in roll call and stuffed me into a smaller group of twenty other women, not from my French transport. They marched us out through the big gates and along the lake. I got a glimpse of the SS staff housing—there were neat, long swaths of red flowers bordering their front yards, and window boxes. A woman in civilian clothes was sweeping up leaves with a couple of tiny tot kids, and the kids were throwing leaves at each other and they were all laughing. They looked so *ordinary*. My heart lifted a little. I was outside those terrible walls again. The last three weeks hadn't been easy, but they were over and I was out.

It is a longish walk from the main Camp to Siemens, about half a mile. You could see Fürstenberg and its church spire across the lake, like a “Scenes from Old Europe” picture on a jigsaw puzzle. On our side of the lake, we passed hundreds of Ravensbrück prisoners busy at something or other—cutting reeds, hauling potatoes and firewood from somewhere, unloading barges full of coal. Finally we came to another complex of long gray buildings behind chain-link and barbed-wire electrified fences that was the Siemens factory itself. Around the buildings here, other prisoners were doing hard, hard labor, unloading iron pigs from railway cars and dragging them away in wagonloads. But this is where my Luftwaffe letter of recommendation suddenly kicked in. *Thank God*, I thought as I realized what was going on—thank you, Luftwaffe commander, thank you, Karl Womelsdorff.

I sat in an office and had to do a couple of aptitude tests (no language aptitude required)—guide a thread around a series of tacks on a board and fold a piece of paper in a particular way, following visual instructions. Finally I had to learn to wind thin copper wire around an iron bobbin. And then I had a “skilled” job, just like they'd told me I would—technically it was even a *paid* job, though nobody ever gave you any money;

they just jotted down your wages against your number. I sat at a bench under bright electric lights in a relatively clean and airy factory barracks, wrapping strands of copper wire around iron bobbins. The factory was decent because German civilians from Fürstenberg worked there, too. I was a prisoner, but I was healthy and clean enough that I could work in the same room with normal people, though we weren't allowed to speak to each other (not that I could). The dorms at Siemens were cleaner, too, and less crowded. We were still three to a bed, but the mattresses were better and we had two blankets among the three of us and the toilet worked. We were all issued kerchiefs to cover up how savagely some of us had been scalped.

I missed Elodie like crazy, and most of my ill-gotten belongings (toothbrush, soap, etc.) were still hidden in a crack between the boards of my never-to-be-revisited bunk in Block 8. I didn't meet anyone in my new barracks who spoke either French or English. But see, I'd waited out the dreadful quarantine believing my life would improve, and it did.

I lasted three days.

That's counting the time I stood at my bench doing *nothing* for eighteen hours, waiting for someone to shoot me.

It wasn't that I couldn't do the work. The summer before my senior year in high school I worked at the paper box factory in Mount Jericho. It was the same kind of work—just folding and sticking on an assembly line. Actually, it was *worse* at the paper box factory because the air was so dusty and it was so hot that summer. And it was so boring—the only interesting thing that happened the whole summer was when Polly put that cigarette butt in her pocket and set her apron on fire. The work was worth it—I needed the money for coming to England. But it wasn't a fun job, and I stuck with it and was pleased with myself afterward.

Okay, here I was on another assembly line, doing work that I knew I could handle, and hoping for the war to end at any minute—so why did I go and ruin it all?

I blame it on a couple of civilian workers, although that's not really fair. I'd have figured it out on my own eventually. I heard them talking when we were coming in after the dinner break, and I heard a word I recognized:

Vergeltungswaffe. Vengeance weapon.

I filed meekly back to my place at the long table full of copper wire and iron spools. And in the back of my head, the word was echoing over and over with the clattering rhythm of an approaching doodlebug:

Vergeltungswaffe, Vergeltungswaffe.

I sat down. I picked up a piece of copper wire.

I was making electrical relays for flying bomb fuses.

I put down the piece of wire. Then I just sat there staring at it for twenty minutes. I was so quiet, so utterly unfussy, that it took twenty minutes for anyone to notice I had stopped working. At least, it took the foreman twenty minutes to notice I had stopped working. The prisoners on either side of me didn't say anything—they just quietly beavered away at their own electrical relays.

The foreman eventually came over and gave me a gentle prod in the ribs with the end of a ruler. The civilians didn't like to touch the Ravensbrück prisoners, and no wonder—even when we were clean we were still livid with bug bites. My shins were so bitten they looked sunburned. I knew exactly what the ruler poke meant—he didn't have to say anything in any language. I wanted to be willing—God knows I wanted to cooperate; I didn't want to get in trouble. I picked up the wire thread.

And I just couldn't do it.

Now this, *this* I remember like it was this morning. I watch my hands writing here on the vanity table in the Paris Ritz and I can see it happening. I picked up the wire thread, wrapped it once around the spool, and I saw Maddie's hands instead of mine. Just in a blinking flash. Maddie's pretty, capable hands, with the old French-cut ruby sparkling on her ring finger, taking apart the bomb fuse that Uncle Roger had sent me.

I closed my eyes to make it go away. My own hands were still frozen in place over the new relay. And when I closed my eyes, I saw the little boy's hands from my nightmare—small, dirty fingers blown to bloody splinters.

And I *just couldn't do it*.

It wasn't a conscious decision. It wasn't rebellion. It wasn't

sabotage. It wasn't my conscience nagging at me. It wasn't anything noble. God knows I wouldn't have been brave enough to do anything noble! But now that I knew what I was making—I just couldn't do it.

I laid the wire gently on the table. Then I laid my hands in my lap. The foreman called over the SS guard who was in charge of the prison workers.

Gosh, they gave no quarter, those SS guards. They didn't waste any time, *ever*. This one didn't even try to talk to me. She took hold of my skull—just grabbed me by the back of my head—and *slammed* my forehead down on the table. For a moment it felt like my head had exploded, sparkling light everywhere. Then she shifted her grip on my head to force me back upright, and with her free hand she picked up the strand of copper wire and tossed it on the table in front of me.

Beneath her grip I shook my head sadly. NO.

She slammed my face back down on the table, and I have got a scar, just above my left eye, where the copper wire cut me. It's so thin you probably can't see it—I am not brave enough to look. But I can feel it and I know it's there. I count it as a flying bomb scar.

The guard let go of my head.

“Aufstehen!”

Get up. You got to know what that meant after a while, because you had to do it so much.

They didn't do anything else—just made me stand up. The copper wire and relay bobbins I was supposed to be working on still lay there on the table in front of me. The prisoners around me were still hunched over their own relays just the way they'd been when I first stopped working, diligently trying not to notice what was going on.

It was like when I took the fuse from the boy on the railway line in Hamble. I was sure I was going to be killed. And it made me sad—not scared, but sad that I had forced myself into this corner where I just couldn't win.

But they didn't kill me. They didn't even hit me again. They just made me stand there.

I stood there for the rest of the day. And all night. And into

the next day.

People came and went around me. Production went on during the night, so everybody changed shifts around me and I went on standing there.

They kept an eye on me. There were a couple of extra guards brought in especially for me. They wouldn't let me touch the long table with my hands or lean against the bench. It got harder and harder not to. I started dreaming about my crowded bunk with its thin mattress and shared blanket. The copper wire on the table in front of me danced and gleamed beneath the harsh factory lights. I heard the screaming sirens go and thought smugly, through the daze of exhaustion, *I've missed two roll calls.*

Not that I'd have been doing anything else in a roll call except just standing there!

In the middle of the night, when I'd been on my feet for probably more than twelve hours—and of course I'd been working for six hours before that, and awake since the four a.m. siren the previous day—there was a point when all I wanted to do was lie down under the table and go to sleep. If I couldn't do that, then I might as well be dead. I was pretty sure I didn't care anymore. I'd reached the point when I thought I would do *anything* to be allowed to sit down—so very carefully, I stepped over the bench and sat down and picked up the copper wire that was waiting for me.

It was bliss, sheer bliss, to sit down, even though I was still sitting upright—*bliss* just to be allowed to sit. I didn't think I'd get away with just sitting there, though. I was showing them they'd won, and I was going to have to go back to work. I knew they'd make me finish up the rest of that shift, or make up the time I'd wasted. So I started to wrap the wire around the spool.

And you know what?

I still couldn't do it.

I put the wire down quietly. I put my hands on the table and pushed myself to my feet somehow. And somehow I managed to climb back over the bench so I was standing behind it again.

The other prisoners glanced up at me briefly and then

away. Nobody smiled. The guards and the foreman chatted together for a while, and then the foreman took away my copper wire and the spools and gave them to someone else to finish up. They didn't do anything to me—didn't hit me, didn't make me leave the room—just made me go on standing there.

Only, while before it had been a battle of will between us—*stand there until you feel like working*—now I was being punished because I'd refused to work.

This made everything a little different. Also, it woke me up.

I'd sat down because I thought I'd been completely at the end of my strength. Obviously I wasn't. But I was pretty close to it, and now I no longer had a way out. I *knew* this. Also, now I didn't know where the whole thing was going, and that was very frightening. So I had to readjust something in my head to help me focus on not losing my mind with fear and exhaustion.

So I made up a poem.

It sort of started in my head as a chant about wires and fuses. It wasn't anything profound or memorable, just a sort of counting-out rhyme based on something I'd tried to write last summer—rhyming words in a list, like the list of Polish girls' names that we all memorized and that I reported to the American Embassy as well as the Swedish Red Cross, and which I will report again to anyone else who will listen.

It was as though ever since I left Camp Los Angeles I'd been flying a plane so nose-high that I couldn't see anything below me, because if I looked down I'd be looking into hell and I didn't want to see. I knew it was there. But as long as I didn't look, as long as I kept the nose up, I could fool myself into thinking it wasn't. My Luftwaffe recommendation would protect me. There would be better beds and food and toilets when I was out of quarantine. The Allies would be here in a month. I wouldn't make trouble. I would be all right.

So now I'd raised the nose too high, and I was going to lose control of the aircraft and plummet into a spin. And when I did, like Celia's Tempest, I would fall and I would be in hell. Really and truly and for good.

So I stood there until I fell.

I don't remember this part very well. It really is a blur, not

because I've forgotten, but because I was already so dazed while it was happening. I ended up soaking wet—I remember being utterly drenched and freezing cold. They must have hosed me down to wake me up so they didn't have to carry me back to the main Camp, and I *did* walk—incredibly, I am sure I walked. I know it was October and early in the morning, and windy, so it would have been chilly anyway even if I hadn't been completely dripping wet. The wind felt like knives of ice, and they wouldn't let me hug my arms around me—I had to walk with my hands at my sides. I don't remember passing the lake or the gates or what the sky looked like or if there were other prisoners around, or even where they were taking me, and when they'd left me locked in a shadowy bare concrete cupboard of a cell, I didn't care, because there was a narrow iron bed with a wooden plank for a mattress and no one in it. I curled in a tight, shaking ball against the dank wall and fell instantly asleep without even looking to see if there was a blanket.

Of course there wasn't.

I was in the cell block, the Bunker, for two weeks. The veterans say you aren't a real Ravensbrück prisoner till you've been in the Bunker. Irina was there for *four months* in solitary confinement while they interrogated her about the Soviet Air Force in 1943, and it is also where they did the last batch of medical experiments on the Rabbits, when they tied the girls down and gagged them before they operated on them. I feel like two weeks isn't really long enough to count as time in the Bunker, especially since they fed me once a day and left me alone in between my two doses of twenty-five lashes—my twice *Fünfundzwanzig*. There was a week in between each round because if you get fifty at once you're likely to die. Twice twenty-five was a mild punishment for failing to make parts for flying bombs. Deliberate sabotage is punishable by *death*, so I was lucky I just stopped working and didn't try to do anything more underhanded. After they finished my second beating, I got put straight back into the main Camp.

They make you count aloud as they thrash you. You are supposed to count, in German, the number of strokes you are given. Thanks to Grampa, of course, I could make it up to

twenty, but like a jillion other pathetic creatures, I didn't know how to count beyond that, so they had to prompt me. I managed it the first time but not the second.

I said they left me alone between the beatings and that's true, but the week between them was pretty awful. Because this time I knew what was coming, and I was already in bad shape. There wasn't anything to do but lie in the gloom and wait for next Friday—flat on my face on the bare planks, listening to the Screamer siren counting off the days. My mind skips lightly over that week and that second Friday—even what I *can* remember, I don't want to. I don't remember being tied to the sawhorse or if I saw the stinking Commander, though I know he liked to watch and he was always there on Fridays. The counting, the second time, was the significant thing. The *really* significant thing.

I got to eight, and after that I thought I couldn't speak. They kept going and I was still counting in my head, in English, because I knew that when I got to twenty-five it would be over, and counting was the only thing I could do to move things along. I lost count at fifteen. I must have been unconscious by twenty. At any rate I don't remember how it ended or what happened after.

I woke up lying on my stomach on another bare wood slab in an acre of endless, empty, stinking plank bunks—there wasn't one above me, but the ceiling was so close I couldn't have sat upright if I'd wanted to, and the closeness made it so dark you couldn't see where the bunks ended. It was gray twilight, and that was because somewhere in the room, below me, there were windows, and it was still light out. I didn't know where I was or how I'd got there, though it was obviously another part of the same god-awful prison complex.

It was quiet and I couldn't move, even though I was awake. I just lay blinking and breathing—not really thinking. Not even feeling sorry for myself.

I'd more or less forgotten who I was.

So then a voice near my head commanded in English, "Say your poem."

The command made no sense, and I didn't even try to

answer.

“Say your poem,” the voice insisted. “Say the counting-out rhyme.”

Counting—that made more sense. The last thing I could remember was being told to count, and the last thing I could remember doing was trying to count aloud, so I kind of assumed we were picking up where we’d left off. I felt certain that whether or not I obeyed I’d eventually wind up unconscious again, if not dead. But maybe if I cooperated we’d get it over with quickly. And so a poem called “Counting-out Rhyme” began to spill abruptly out of me.

“Silver bark of beech, and sallow
Bark of yellow birch and yellow
Twig of willow.”

I said it very slowly.

While I was speaking, a strange thing happened. I began picturing the springtime woods of Pennsylvania, each branch and twig, as I said its name. I had to stop after the first verse—just three lines—because it was exhausting.

“Go on,” said the nearby voice.

After a moment of despair, I pulled myself together and went on.

“Stripe of green in moosewood maple,
Color seen in leaf of apple,
Bark of popple.”

And you know, it was like I was breathing my own self back into me to say these words, to remember that these things existed—the green trees of the eastern woodland at home in North America, their strong and supple branches, sunlight through the leaves.

Incredible to think these same spring leaves are uncurling there now.

“Wood of popple pale as moonbeam,
Wood of oak for yoke and barn-beam,
Wood of hornbeam.”

It was MAGICAL to say their names. It was a blessing. It was holy.

“Silver bark of beech, and hollow
Stem of elder, tall and yellow
Twig of willow.”

I was finished. That is the whole poem. There was a pause.

“Is that your poem?”

“No. It’s by Edna St. Vincent Millay.”

“Do you know more?”

“Dozens,” I croaked. “She’s my favorite poet.”

Oh, what a lot she’s got to answer for, Edna St. Vincent Millay, whipping the youth of America into action in Europe. I’m sure she didn’t mean for me to end up in the Ravensbrück women’s concentration camp in Germany when she signed my copy of *Make Bright the Arrows* in that lecture hall at Jericho Valley College last spring, and shook my hand and wished me good luck ferrying planes in England.

“Is that the poem you said when they were beating you?”

“What?”

“They told you to count and you said it was a counting-out rhyme. They stopped halfway through so they could call in Gitte, our *Blockova*, to watch and to translate, because you knew so much about munitions they decided they would have to put you in high security—here, Block 32. With the Soviet Red Army women soldiers and the Polish experimental Rabbits and the French Night and Fog spies. And when they brought you here, our *Blockova*, Gitte, told me to ask you to tell me your poem, because I am trying to learn poetry in English for my exams.”

My interrogator was Polish. Her heavily accented English

was just like Felicyta's, though the voice was different—higher, soprano instead of alto. And younger. I could tell.

“*Blockova?*”

“Block leader. You might as well learn *Blockova*, because no one ever calls them anything else. It's a Polish word, not German. The *Blockovas* are prisoners, too. Most of the group leaders are prisoners. The German criminals are the worst. Look out for them; they've got green triangles to show they're criminals and red armbands to show they're forewomen. They'll report you for *smiling* if they don't like your face. Gitte's all right; she's a political prisoner, a German communist. Handed out one too many anti-Nazi leaflets!”

I can't really write her accent or her idioms without making her sound stupid, and she never did sound stupid. Anyway, I can't remember them. I always understood her. So I am just going to write it the way I understood it, not the way she said it.

“You're learning poetry for your *exams*?” I repeated, completely bewildered.

“Yes, they pulled a lot of us out of school when they arrested us, along with half the professional scholars in Poland—all the ones they didn't just murder right away. So the students are trying to earn our diplomas with the professors. Oh well, it's a good thing to pretend, anyway—that the war will end before we're all shot or starved to death, and that I will need a diploma. Like you reciting poetry while they beat you.”

“I don't remember—”

I began to say it, and then suddenly I did remember.

“*Oh!*”

This is what I'd done: I'd continued my instinctive effort to save my sanity that began when they first took away my relays for the bomb fuses. When I stopped counting during the second beating, I started muttering aloud the poem I'd been making up for the past two weeks—the words I'd had in my head as I stood swaying with exhaustion in the Siemens factory, the words I'd whispered to myself in the dark in the cold, cramped cell in the Bunker.

So now I remembered my sanity-saving poem, but I still

didn't move. I was still lying flat on my face.

"Go on," the Polish student prompted me.

I remembered the whole thing.

I wrote a few words of it in England last summer—I think it is in this notebook, but I haven't got the heart to look back at anything I wrote last summer. This will be the first time I've ever written down the finished poem.

COUNTING-OUT RHYME (by Rose Justice)

Silver tube of fuse and hollow
cylinder of detonator
cap and gyro.

Toppled gyro forcing action,
copper wire to spark ignition,
pulse jet engine.

Amatol before explosion,
Bosch and Siemens, Argus, Fieseler,
in production.

Shining fragile fuse and hollow
warhead fuselage awaiting
detonation.

"Is that by your favorite poet as well?" the Polish girl asked. "Edna Millay?"

"No, that's by me. I made it up."

"What is it about? Not trees this time."

"Flying bombs. It's about making them. Or not making them—that's why they punished me."

"I will give you one slice of bread for every poem you make me. I can do it. I'm one of the Camp Rabbits, the *Króliki*, and people take care of me. Every time you make me a new poem, I'll get you an *extra* slice of bread."

I didn't know it then. But I know it now and I'm sure of it. My counting-out rhyme saved me from starving to death this winter.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"I'm Polish Political Prisoner 7705," she reeled off, glib and bitter. "I'm a Rabbit."

"Don't be stupid."

I don't know how I knew I could talk to her like that. I hadn't even looked at her yet.

"My name is Róża Czajkowska," she said.

In my ears it sounded like a meaningless babble of foreign sound. Very humbly, and worried that she would go away if I offended her, I asked her to spell it.

"Oh, I can't do English letters out loud," she answered with deep scorn. "Róża. How difficult is that? It means 'rose' in English."

I turned my head for the first time since I'd woken up. It was exhausting. But I could see her now.

She was—she is—seventeen. She was the tiniest seventeen-year-old I'd ever seen—I thought she was about eleven when I first saw her, the thinnest, most starved-looking kid alive. Being starved-looking was the only thing I noticed about her at first, her only distinguishing feature—it still hadn't dawned on me that this wasn't a distinguishing feature at Ravensbrück, and that Róża had other, more significant peculiarities. She had long hair—a lot of the long-term prisoners did—but it was hidden beneath a headscarf, and her dress was one of the old-style gray-and-blue striped uniforms.

"Rose!" I exclaimed.

"Róża," she corrected. "People call me Różyczka sometimes, little Rose, because I am so little."

"Little Rose—like Rosie? How do you say it?"

"Say 'Ro-shij-ka.' Różyczka!"

"Różyczka!"

"It is my pleasure to meet you, English-speaking French

Political Prisoner 51498. What's *your* name?"

"Rose Justice," I said, remembering who I was. "Rose. Or Rosie. Same as yours."

She gave a giggling, maniacal howl of laughter.

At the other end of the narrow aisle that led between the rows of bunks, there came the sound of footsteps. After a moment the footsteps stopped—another turbaned head appeared. (It was Gitte, our extremely wonderful German *Blockova*.) I couldn't have begun to guess Gitte's age when I first saw her face that afternoon—honestly, she could have been anywhere between twenty-five and a hundred. She said something sharply to Róža in German. Róža patted me on the head like a dog. She said to Gitte in English, "Look—Justice has come to Ravensbrück!" and let out another cackling peal of laughter.

Then Róža patted a thin cotton blanket that was folded near my head.

"Listen, English-Speaking French Political Prisoner with the same name as me. I have to go back to work. There's a blanket here if you want it now, but you have to give it back to the others later, and no one will thank you if she has to wash blood out of it, so keep it off your backside. I'll bring your supper here, but you'll have to get up to come to the six thirty roll call." She giggled again before she added, "I'll help you if you can't walk."

Gitte gave a sigh of indulgence. She assured me in English, "Someone else will help."

She reached toward Róža to help her down from the bunk. At first I thought it was just because Róža was so little. She put her arms around Gitte's neck like a monkey, and let herself be lifted to the murky floor. Then I saw the back of her legs and I understood why she needed help climbing down, and why her offer of support to me was such a joke.

Both her legs had been split in half. That's what it looked like—from knee to ankle in the back of her calves were long clefts so deep you could poke your finger in them up to the second knuckle.

I gasped aloud in horror. It shook me physically—I actually

flinched backward, away from Róza's awful legs, and then I gasped again in pain because it hurt so much to move.

Róza's injuries weren't new—her legs had healed that way. They were as good as they were going to get. When Gitte put Róza down and she turned around to face me, I could see a trio of sunken, dented scars in the front of her right leg, half an inch deep, *where bone should have been*.

It looked like her legs had been split with a butcher knife and then she'd been shot at close range.

She picked up a makeshift crutch—a Y-shaped stick padded with more of the striped prison cloth—and injected it beneath her right arm.

"Can you knit?" she demanded.

"Sort of."

She pulled a face and mimicked, "*Sort of*."

"You're an 'Available,'" Gitte told me. "*Verfügbar*. That means you're not assigned to any special work."

"You have to line up in the morning and go wherever they send you," Róza elaborated. "Shoveling shit, maybe, or burning corpses. Anything. Usually things nobody else wants to do."

I blinked down at her, still lying flat, too much of a wreck to lift my head. *A skilled job*. Well, I'd had my chance.

"Hey, don't cry. We'll keep you inside the block for a few days—till you can sit down, anyway. Gitte's going to say she needs another knitter to keep the quota up this week, since Zosia and Genca were shot."

Then Róza disappeared into the twilight aisle between the bunks, escorted by the ageless block leader. I was too high up to see them go. But I could hear Róza's progress as her wooden clogs clomped against the dank concrete floor, punctuated by the thump of her crutch.

After about thirty seconds, the clomping and thumping stopped suddenly. She yelled back at me, in English, "*One piece of bread per poem!*"

Until November we had two evening roll calls—that was the way they'd always done it, one at six thirty and one at nine p.m.

Eventually they stopped the six thirty one because there were so many of us it was taking up to three hours three times a day to count us all. But the week I came to Block 32 they were still doing both evening roll calls, and I went to both. I have no memory of either one, or of climbing up to and down out of the top bunk. The population of Block 32 was really, really good at propping people up.

In between the roll calls, I am pretty sure I did nothing but lie on my face. I was all burny with a light fever and I didn't want to eat anything, and Róza for whatever reason didn't follow through with her promise to bring me supper—to be fair, there wasn't a notice up saying FEED THE NEW GIRL IN THE TOP BUNK, and I was still nothing more to any of them than just the unknown person who'd be making up the murdered Zosia's and Genca's knitting quota.

Gosh, I was dazed.

What I do remember is that suddenly on this plank where I'd been sprawled flat on my face all afternoon there were three other people trying to make themselves comfortable. We struck a kind of bargain where I got to stay sprawled and the rest of them got the blanket, only they had to sleep sitting up. Or as near upright as you can get when the ceiling is three feet above your head and you are asleep.

We slept that way for five hours, maybe, and then the four a.m. Screamer went, and it was a scramble to the horrible toilet ditches before the four thirty roll call. And that was me back on my feet.

I said my counting-out rhyme saved my life, and it's true, because saying it during my beating is what made Gitte notice me and give me to Lisette to take care of. You were *dead* if you didn't have someone looking out for you. But I never had to worry about finding a teammate. I was *so lucky*. Lisette's bunkmates in Block 32 weren't just a team—we were a proper Camp Family, with Lisette in the role of *Lagermutter*, Camp Mother.

It took me some time to notice Lisette was there, because Róza acted like she ruled the roost and Lisette was so quiet. Lisette was older than *Daddy*, but she didn't really look it, partly because she'd been such a beauty. I like to think she will be

again. It was a game I played during roll calls, trying to picture everybody in real life. Lisette Romilly, possibly France's most popular detective novelist, Jazz Age flapper who drank cocktails with F. Scott Fitzgerald in Paris, then surprised everybody by marrying the principal cellist of the Lublin Philharmonic and uprooting herself to move to Poland. She had three boys all as handsome and talented as their parents, she became an archivist at the Catholic University of Lublin, she learned to play the bass violin at the age of thirty-two, and within two years she became so good they let her join the orchestra.

Her husband was Jewish. He and her three boys—the oldest was two years younger than me—were all swept up in 1939 and marched out of the city and shot on the road. They didn't even take them to a camp. Lisette got thrown out of their apartment, and there she was, widowed, her children dead, owning nothing, in a foreign country at war. She had no work, because the Germans had closed down all the Polish universities. She tried to go back to France and got arrested at the train station. When it first happened, she thought it was for carrying a cello without a license or something like that. But actually, they arrested practically anyone who was connected with the Polish universities. I think they shot most of them.

I loved Lisette. We all loved Lisette.

LISETTE WAITS (by Rose Justice)

Her suitcases are full. But after all
she leaves them standing lifeless in the hall
and takes the cello—for its golden voice
sings back to life her murdered love and boys.

She leaves behind her mother's silver service,
linen and pearls and books. The railway office
demands she buy two tickets; so she does.
The cello's all she has and ever was.

The piercing whistle tells the tracks are clear.

She strains to glimpse the plume of steam draw near
and sees the uniforms, a distant gun
aimed at her breast. The cello cannot run.

She pulls it to her heart, fearing the worst,
still praying for the train to reach them first.

Lisette was in prison in Lublin for a while before they sent her to Ravensbrück, and she was part of Róža's transport. There were about 140 of them to begin with. A lot of them had already been killed one way or another by the time I got thrown in with them, and it doesn't take a genius to see why Lisette adopted me—why she adopted Róža, why she was a natural *Lagermutter*. She *needed* people to mother. It was how she stayed sane.

Lisette didn't care about my head full of poetry in English. She had a reasonable supply in her own head, along with an inexhaustible supply of French and Polish and Russian and German poems, too. I got tucked under Lisette's wing because Zosia and Genca, the girls who had been shot last week, had also been her adopted daughters, along with Róža and Karolina. The *Blockova*, Gitte, hadn't just had Róža's thirst for poetry in mind when she'd boosted me, semiconscious, into that particular bunk under the roof. I was there for Lisette to look after, to distract her from going crazy with grief and fury all over again.

I must have been the slowest knitter of anybody in the block. I hadn't knitted in the round before, and I'd never tried holding the yarn in my left hand like the rest of them; but fortunately all we were making were socks. I didn't *mind* knitting socks for German soldiers. German soldiers need socks. If they were going to force me to do anything for the Axis war effort, keeping conscripted boys' feet warm on the Eastern Front was okay. Making bombs was not okay.

I did my knitting standing up. I ate standing up. The back of my dress had dark brown stripes of dried blood across it that I never managed to wash out in the whole time I wore it.

The knitting went on in the block itself. There was a big main room on either side of the so-called washroom in the middle. We ate in the big rooms, and that was also where the knitters worked in the day. Older women knitted, or people who couldn't walk. There was a guard who watched over everything as we got to work, but mostly they left things up to Gitte, the *Blockova*. As long as we got the required number of socks knitted, they didn't waste time keeping an eye on us. And as soon as the SS guards were gone in the morning, everybody relaxed a little bit. We still had to work like fury—if we didn't meet the quotas, everyone got punished with an extra hour or two of “*Strafstehen*”—punishment standing—waiting outside the barrack in the dark after the last roll call of the day. But the knitters could talk to one another, a huge advantage and privilege.

Róza sat on the table facing me, resting her feet on the bench. She'd stowed her wooden clogs and her crutch underneath the table. She didn't say anything to me for about an hour—just eyed me up and down critically, while another woman carried on a quiz session in Polish. They played school, mathematicians and geologists and historians taking turns at tutoring the younger girls. I didn't understand any of it, and after a while I began to hate the sound of their meaningless foreign voices. It was a nightmare I could never really define, to have so many people packed around me and not be able to communicate with any of them unless they felt like it.

They took a break in the lecture after a while, though we all kept on furiously producing limitless amounts of gray wool tubing (which of course we were never allowed to use ourselves, even when it was snowing). By the time they got to their recess, I was swaying on my feet. I couldn't sit, but I couldn't really stand yet, either—not for the whole day. It was about ten o'clock in the morning and I'd been up since four.

“So how come you're French, if you don't speak anything but English?” Róza asked. “Are you another parachutist?”

I shook my head. “I don't know what you mean.”

“There are a few English ladies here who were dropped into France by parachute, as spies. Are you a spy?”

“Gosh—would I tell you if I was?”

She laughed. It was a real laugh this time, a bubbly giggle of a laugh, not the other bitter, ironic cackle. “You look French—bald. When Paris was liberated, they shaved all the French prisoners’ heads again as punishment. What are you, then? And how did you end up here?”

“Are your English ladies here now?” I asked.

“No, they’re not in this block. And even if they were, they’re not cripples. They have to do real work,” Róza said offhandedly.

“Are you *all* crippled?” I asked, looking around the room. I wondered, Am I here because I’ve been crippled? No, I’d been given six hours to recover and now I was already on my feet. Apart from the Polish girls who’d come back inside to knit after the morning roll call, all the rest of the Block 32 prisoners were fine—none of the French or Russian women had anything wrong with them apart from being filthy dirty and covered with scabies and starving, and they’d all marched off on work details that morning. “What *happened* to you?” I asked.

“Why don’t you tell me what happened to *you*, since I asked first,” Róza said seriously. “Because if we start talking about me, you won’t believe me, and we’ll argue. Tell me about 51498, the French political prisoner with no French.”

“*Pardonez-moi, mais je parle un peu de français*,” I said. Excuse me, but I do speak a little French. More now than I did then, of course.

“*Moi aussi, plus bien que toi*,” she answered. “Me too, better than you. And I learned most of it here, in Lisette’s French class. You should never use *vous*, the formal ‘you,’ to another prisoner—we’re comrades. Not even to Lisette, who’s older than my mother was. Are you sure you’re not a spy? How did you get to Ravensbrück speaking only English?”

“I’m American. I’m a pilot in the Air Transport Auxiliary in England—we ferry aircraft for the Royal Air Force. I landed in the wrong place, and they sent me here. I got registered with a transport of French prisoners and they counted me as French, too.”

“Hah! Too bad you can’t speak German or you could report the stupid bitch who signed you up as French. She’d get in

trouble for sloppy record-keeping.”

“Boy, I wish she would,” I said with feeling.

Róża gleefully repeated my story in Polish so that it could be passed around the rest of the room, and once again everyone shot questions at me about the invasion and the Allied advance and how soon the war was likely to end. (The Polish prisoners were pretty good at English, it turned out; later I realized they carried out some of their lessons totally in English.) I told them about D-Day and how we handed out the strawberries to the soldiers, and my gosh that was a hit.

“How many did each soldier get?”

“Did you eat any yourself?”

“How big were they?”

“What variety?”

We switched topics from politics to food and I described the way Felicyta had made the little squares of toast with jam on them after Celia’s funeral.

Someone burst out with an exclamation in an excited voice, and everybody laughed.

“They think we could do that, too,” Róża explained drily. “The next time somebody gets jam. Sometimes a food package makes it through without the goddamned SS stealing everything in it except the paper it was wrapped in.”

“They took *my* paper,” I said. “I had chocolate.”

“Chocolate!”

They were off again.

“Hey, why don’t you lie across the table here?” Róża said suddenly. “Here by me. You can lean on your arms with your wrists over the edge so you can go on working. Pile the wool on the bench. Yeah, like that. Better?”

It was better. The women on the other side of the table had to squeeze up a little to make room for my legs, but they compromised by using them as a backrest.

“Just be ready to get down in a hurry if one of the guards comes in. Code word this week is *muffins*.” (I don’t really remember what the code word was that week. It was always food-based: “Oh, how I wish I had ten muffins for lunch!” I

know a lot of Polish words for food now.) “Listen to Maria—she can see the window.”

Lying flat on my stomach across the table with my not-very-advanced sock dangling over the edge next to Róża’s knee, I had a close-up view of her thin right leg with the row of holes gouged in her shin. I couldn’t see anybody else’s legs, because they were all sitting the right way around with their feet under the table, and everybody was packed very close together. The absolutely awful thing about the damage to Róża’s leg was that it was so obviously permanent—it had *healed* that way.

“Have you made me a poem yet?” she demanded.

“No.”

“No extra bread for you today.”

I said to Róża, “I’m not giving you a poem till you tell me what happened to everybody’s legs.”

She tapped her shin with one of her knitting needles. I didn’t dare to look, but I couldn’t help seeing out of my peripheral vision. She was poking the tip of the steel needle into one of the holes—*just awful*. Macabre and awful. Then she made a loud announcement in Polish. People turned interested heads in our direction. Nobody stopped working.

“Everyone in my transport is condemned to death,” she explained in English. “*Special Transport*. Condemned, all of us. They’ve executed dozens of us already. But some of us they didn’t kill right away, and since they plan for us all to end up dead anyway, they used us—tested us...”

She hesitated, not with emotion, but just because she couldn’t find the right words. I don’t think she could find the right words in English or Polish. She used words like *experiment* and *trial* and *medical*, and they came out of her mouth so laden with sarcasm and hatred that it sounded like she was telling a really bad joke.

“They ‘operated’ on seventy-four of us, all Polish, mostly students from my transport. My *special* transport. Like experimental rabbits. That’s why we still get called Rabbits, *Króliki*—*Kaninchen* in German. Actually, what we said was that we’re *not* rabbits; one of the first girls operated on yelled it at one of the doctors and he thought it was funny. And it stuck. So

that's what they did; they cut us up like rabbits. They'd slice your calf open and fill the wound with gangrene and then seal it up in plaster for two weeks. Or they'd cut pieces out of your muscles or your nerves. Or they'd cut a chunk of bone out of your leg and try to stick it in someone else's leg. I am special—I got operated on five times! Because I am so young and healthy, get it? They said they wanted to learn how to treat 'wounds in the field'—'the field' means the Eastern Front, which is where most of Germany's wounded soldiers are—so they'd 'simulate' war wounds on us. Make a hole like a gunshot wound and then see what happens to it if you put a dirty bandage on it in a trench and never change the dressing. Guess what happens."

I swallowed but couldn't answer. The iron needles seemed to waver in front of my face, as if I were looking at them through a sheet of old glass.

"Look, I'll show you what happens—" She barked orders in Polish at the girls sitting on her left and on my right.

They never stopped knitting. They turned around on the bench—they had room to do it because Róża and I were on the table. They stuck their own legs out in front of me, turning and showing off their scars as if they were models at a fashion show.

I burst out, "*I heard about you on the radio.*"

Róża dropped a needle.

It clattered on the concrete floor, and the girl next to her dived to pick it up. They chattered together in rapid excitement, and then suddenly the whole room was buzzing again—really *buzzing*—and they were all focused on me.

"You *heard*? On the *radio*? On the BBC? What did they say? Does everyone know?"

Róża explained very quickly, "Some of us died of it, some of us have been executed, but most of us are still alive, and we have been *fighting* to get the story to spread outside the Camp. We smuggled out letters addressed to the BBC and the Vatican and the Red Cross headquarters in Geneva. Now we are such an embarrassment to the Camp administration that they don't know what to do with us—we're all still condemned to be killed, but they're scared to do it. They know we've been telling people, they know it's leaking out—we got a blessing sent to us

by the *Pope*! A civilian worker in Siemens will hear, or someone from the men's camp, or a prisoner who knows about us will get released or transferred to another camp. It's getting out. *Someday*, the bastards will have to *account* for what they did to us. What did you hear?"

"I don't know who it was. The report was about an American woman who'd been in a prison camp in Germany—she had a list of names."

"It was *Aka*! She *does* have American citizenship! It was *us*! See, *it's working*! What did you do when you heard? What did you think? What did people say?"

I hesitated. They were so excited, and my answer was going to be so disappointing.

"We didn't do anything," I said. "We just thought it was anti-German propaganda. No one believed it."

"No goddamn extra bread for you *ever*," Róża snarled with venomous resentment.

Instead of snapping back at her, I sang softly,

*"Rose, Rose, Rose, Rose,
Will I ever see thee wed?"*

"*You bitch*," she murmured, just as soft.
"It's a round. It's easy. I'll teach you."

*"Rose, Rose, Rose, Rose,
Will I ever see thee wed—"*

Suddenly the girl on my right sang the first line back to me—"Rose, Rose, Rose, Rose." She even picked up the unfamiliar English words of the second line, "*Will I ever see thee wed?*"

*"I will marry at thy will, sir,
At thy will."*

When I started to sing it a third time, a voice across the

table joined in, too.

It didn't take them long. It is an easy round. They were practiced and fast at learning things by heart, and starved for beauty.

And, of course, they knew we were singing to Róża.

"MUFFINS!" yelled the girl at the window.

Instant silence. A dozen hands dragged me off the table. In five seconds we were all bent with our heads over our knitting and a guard stomped in to yell at Gitte for reasons I never figured out.

I got my fair share of bread that night. I didn't recognize the girl who handed it to me as we crowded around the drums of soup. "Thank you!"

"You've got Zosia and Genca to thank, because they're dead," Róża informed me brutally.

"Shut up, Różyczka." The girl who'd given me the bread made a face and told me in a mixture of French and English, "Lisette is your *Lagermutter* now, your Camp Mother, and she's mine and Róża's also. So we'll treat you like a sister."

"I'm Rose," I said.

"I know you're Rose. Rose Justice, American poet. Well, I'm Karolina Salska, Polish filmmaker. Not famous yet. I worked as a projectionist before the war, but what I really want to do is animation, like Disney, you know? You'll pay for the bread by telling me all about *Fantasia*." She added as a breathless afterthought, "You *have* seen *Fantasia*, right?"

"Well, yes, but..." What had happened in *Fantasia*? Mickey Mouse in a wizard's hat and flying horses and...dinosaurs? "It was about four years ago and I don't remember the music."

"Don't worry, I haven't seen it, but I know what they play in every sequence, and Lisette is like a walking music library. We'll get her to hum and you can describe what happens, okay? Gitte sometimes lets us sing after lights-out."

"But—"

"Look, I said don't worry. If you can't remember the whole thing, you can teach me some new American dance tunes as

compensation.” Karolina herded me toward one of the long tables where the knitters worked—Róža curled up under the end of the table on the concrete floor with Lisette and squeezed over to make room for me and Karolina. It was their little family place for a quarter of an hour twice a day, a private nook under the table and out of the chaos of the hundreds of people trying to get to the soup and bread. Karolina tried to let me creep in first, but I couldn’t sit. I had to stay on my knees at the table’s edge. As Karolina shuffled in past me I noticed that she was wearing a Camp Police armband. Then I glanced down at her bare legs and saw the scar splitting her shin.

“You’re a Rabbit!”

She glanced up at me. She’d gone red. “And I like to dance to American music.”

I probably went red, too. “Oh! I didn’t mean you couldn’t dance! I was just surprised about your armband!”

“A few of us are Camp Police. Rabbits are *privileged*. I patrol the antiaircraft ditches and don’t have to go around with SS guards breathing down my neck all the time.”

She tossed her head defiantly, smoothing her kerchief with the back of her hand as if it were her hair. “I don’t limp,” she said. “One operation only, a bacterial infection, very neat. They didn’t peel off the muscle or cut out pieces of my shinbone like they did to Róža—”

“You were sick for longer,” Róža interrupted. “You couldn’t walk for eight months.”

“But you wouldn’t notice now if I was wearing stockings.” Listening to the Rabbits talk about their operations was like watching a horror movie in a foreign language. You sort of hoped you’d misunderstood what was going on. And then when you figured out what was really going on, it was worse than you’d thought.

“I can walk without limping,” Karolina said again. “My legs weren’t even worth a picture, remember?” She turned to me again. “Róža got two snapshots all to herself, front and back.”

“What kind of pictures?” I asked in an agony of confusion. I didn’t think she meant *art*. Did the SS make them *pose*?

“We stole a camera a couple of weeks ago. There’s a

soldiers' prison camp not far from here, and sometimes the Ravensbrück work units have to deliver things there, and people get to talk to the boys. They got us a camera. We took an entire roll of film of the worst damaged legs."

Róża said savagely, "They'll kill us all eventually, but at least we've got evidence." She let out one of her bitter cackles of laughter. "If somebody ever gets the pictures developed. One of the French prisoners is hiding the film—"

At that point Lisette raised one finger to her lips, and both Róża and Karolina gave her their full attention, waiting expectantly.

Lisette said something in Polish. The second she'd finished, they all took a tiny bite of the stale bread, and a moment later I realized that Lisette had just said grace. They were crouching on a dirty concrete floor under a table and they said *grace*.

I was astonished at the time. Now, I understand. It was one of the ways Lisette held herself together.

Then Lisette turned to me and said in casual English, just carrying on the conversation where she'd interrupted it, "Karolina helped take the snapshots, but we can't risk letting her guard the film. That's what you were arrested for in the first place, isn't it, darling? Illegal filming!"

"I didn't film *anything*. I made a short cartoon showing a bunch of wolves herding rabbits into prison trucks," Karolina corrected with satisfaction. "And I still can't believe I got the rabbits right! Anyway, I was arrested for *showing* the film, not for making it." She gave her empty tin bowl a swipe with the hem of her dress and tried to tilt it so she could see her reflection, then sighed at the hopelessness of this project. She stowed the bowl in a little bag on a string tied around her waist. "Believe me, I can't wait to get out of here and do an updated sequel, involving wolf bites. What were you arrested for, Rose?"

"I landed my plane in the wrong place," I said.

Róża snickered and leaped into the conversation. "I was arrested for being a Girl Scout. They arrested my whole Girl Scout troop in the summer of 1941. I was fourteen."

I gaped at her.

"We were delivering plastic explosive for bombs," she said.

“You know, little homemade bombs to sabotage officials’ cars and throw in office windows. Most of us got released, but they kept the oldest—and I didn’t stand a chance, because I’d actually been stopped at a checkpoint and, well, it was pretty obvious I was smuggling explosive. You know how it is when you’re fourteen—you think you’re so much smarter than everybody else and nothing will ever hurt you....” She trailed off, wiping her own bowl with her last crumb of bread, and then said in her offhand way, “They didn’t beat me, but they made me watch while they beat my mother, trying to get me to tell them who I was working for. Lucky for me I didn’t know. Someone always dropped off the stuff in our baskets with a note that said where to take it. They beat the crap out of our Girl Scout leader and then they shot her. So, 51498, what were you doing when you were fourteen?”

“I’m older than you,” I said faintly. “The war hadn’t started yet.”

It had, though. It had already been going on for a year, but the USA wasn’t in it yet. MY GOD, it’s been going on SUCH A LONG TIME.

“Well, what *were* you doing? Do they have Girl Scouts in America?”

“Yes—we—”

Oh—we hung May baskets on people’s doors. Daddy got a brand-new Piper Cub for the flying school, and he took me along to pick it up from Lock Haven, and I flew it all the way home, and Hemlock Council gave me a special “Young Pilot” badge. I went on my second Juniata River canoe trip that summer. We took the Brownies on a picnic to the Conewago Grove Lake. We were not smuggling explosives and we were not being arrested by the Nazis. Nobody executed my troop leader. I did not have to watch my mother being beaten.

That is one of the very simple horrors I can’t shake—I can strip the clothes from a pile of dead bodies without retching, but thinking about this ninth-grade Girl Scout having to watch her mother being tortured still makes me feel sick. Though I am not sure Róża would have grassed on anyone even to save her mother. *Lucky for me I didn’t know.* Why lucky for *her*? Not lucky for the people she was protecting, but lucky for Róża. She

didn't have to choose.

"Do they still—these experiments on people's legs, do they still...?" I couldn't finish the question.

Karolina glanced down at my own bloodstained dress. I'd been kneeling for a quarter of an hour and my knees were aching, but I couldn't sit. I hung on to the edge of the table to hold myself up.

"Don't worry, you're safe," she said. "I mean, your legs are safe. They stopped the experiments last year."

"They might shoot you, of course, but they might do that to anybody," Róza offered.

"Hey, *hey!*" Karolina said, and Lisette suddenly crawled out next to me and grabbed me around the shoulders.

"Don't be scared, darling. Don't let Róza scare you! She makes fun of *everything*. It's how she is."

"She laughs when she's in pain," Karolina assured me. "She doesn't cry, just laughs like a mechanical fortune-teller in a glass box. Don't cry!"

"The war's nearly over," Lisette said soothingly.

"Look, I'll let you in on a secret—" Karolina peeled back the edge of her kerchief. She was hiding a new crop of soft brown curls. "I want to look nice when the American soldiers get here. I've got to make sure no one sees that I'm growing my hair out, though. The guards really hate curly hair."

It had been drizzling all afternoon and was pouring with rain by the nine p.m. roll call, and it was the coldest it had been since I'd got to Germany. I was burning with fever by lights-out—it nearly killed me to have to climb up to the top bunk.

"Why do you sleep so high up?" I gasped. "With your legs the way they are?"

"When people get the shits, it rains down on the lower bunks," Róza explained. "We had to fight the Red Army bitches for the high ones. Mother in heaven, you've never had to fight for anything, have you?"

I was still only capable of lying flat on my face in the crowded bunk, and they all used me for a furnace. Róza and

Karolina snuggled up on either side of me, Karolina behind me with her arms right around me, and Róza in a sodden, shivering ball of misery between me and Lisette.

“Okay,” Karolina demanded. “*Fantasia!* Start with ‘The Sorcerer’s Apprentice’—that’s an easy one. Sing, Lisette!”

“Shh,” Lisette said. “Tomorrow.”

Lisette’s word was law, and she’d been watching me closely; she knew I couldn’t perform any more that night. But I had to give them something, payment for the bread, for being adopted into their family, even if I wasn’t going to give a movie commentary.

“If I grow bitterly,” I whispered, and managed shreds of Edna St. Vincent Millay’s “Scrub.”

“If I grow bitterly,
Like a gnarled and stunted tree,
Bearing harshly of my youth
Puckered fruit that sears the mouth...

“It is that a wind too strong
Bent my back when I was young,
It is that I fear the rain
Lest it blister me again.”

“*Perfect,*” Róza whispered in astonishment. “Beautiful and twisted and exactly like us! Did you think it up today? When did you ever get a chance? You are better than I thought you would be.”

“It’s just more Millay,” I confessed. “My poems aren’t that good.”

The rain on the thin barrack roof sounded exactly like the rain on the roof of the sleeping porch. I ached with such desperate longing for Pennsylvania that I couldn’t tell where the homesickness ended and the dull throb of the bloody slashes on my back began.

I will never be as good a writer as Edna St. Vincent Millay, I thought miserably; my poems will *never* be that good, because

I will die here before I get the chance to write anything worth reading.

OceanofPDF.com

April 24, 1945

Paris

AIR RAID AT RAVENSBRÜCK (by Rose Justice)

“Runter!” they screamed. “Get down!” As if we’d all
leap up like mongrel dogs with our teeth bared.
But being obedient curs, down we all went,
not knowing why yet, flat on our faces, prone,
wet cinders in our mouths. The lights in the street
went out. The guards took cover, their well-bred
Alsations with them. Open siren throats
shrilled an empty threat to swallow us whole.
We lay like forty thousand corpses in rows ten deep
by ourselves, and one thought hit us all hard in the head:

*Run NOW. In the dark—get up and run now. Dare
the charged barbed wire NOW. No one sees or cares.*

But when our brothers-in-arms in the bombers swarmed
over the blackened street, the howling night
leaped up in fury wielding searchlight whips
to flay the planes and skin the moon; the beams
broke harsh across our backs and froze us where
we lay revealed—wild does, not fanged or clawed
but weaponless rabbits and deer, blinking and blind.
No one ran or tried to run, lashed down
by the bright perimeter straps of light, bonds lighter
than moonlit air, heavier than iron chains.

My first air raid was during a roll call. It was about a week
after I got to Block 32, the day before I was deemed well
enough to be booted out of the knitting brigade. As the sirens

went off, they made us lie on our faces. We were like a great big living, breathing target with nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. They turned out the spotlights, but they had searchlights in the antiaircraft ditches sweeping the sky for the planes.

When I heard the planes, I rolled over onto my back—no one cared. I lay with my dress bunched up under my backside and my hands beneath my thighs, cushioning my legs a little because they were still sore, with the back of my bare skull and most of my legs cradled by the cold, damp grit of the ground. I counted thirty-one US Army Air Force Flying Fortresses in the first echelon blacking out the silver moonlit sky, with an escort of fighter planes too far away and tiny to identify in the dark. Barely a mile away from me, 6000 feet above my head, were American boys not much older than me, carrying Pennsylvania Hershey bars in their emergency rations, one hand on the control column and one hand on the throttle. They were looking down at the same scene I'd looked down at a month ago. Beneath the searchlights they'd see the dim outlines of a factory complex and the black rows of barracks roofs, the long black threads of the railway junctions, and the cool lakes shining silver in the light of the glorious full moon.

They'd be too high and it was too dark for them to see any of the forty thousand women lying facedown on the damp gravel, trapped in our wire-and-concrete cage.

A pilot's pinpoint. That's all.

Five rows away from me, someone stood up suddenly. From where I lay she was silhouetted against the sky in the moonlight, six feet tall and skeletal, with a shock of spiky short white hair like an old man with a crew cut. She didn't say anything, just stood with her head thrown back, staring up at the passing planes. The moon lit her bristling hair like frost.

The woman next to her pulled at her skirt, trying to get her to lie down. She completely ignored this, and after a minute she raised one arm to the sky with her fist clenched—not raging, but saluting the airmen above her. Then suddenly she started to shake with sobs. I couldn't hear her—the noise of the next wave of planes overhead and the sirens on the ground drowned out everything else—but I could see her shoulders heaving, and after a moment she stuffed her clenched fist against her mouth

to shut herself up.

The other woman was still pulling at her skirt fearfully, and the tall one snapped at her angrily and reached toward the sky again. This time her hand was open, grasping—as if she were trying to snatch the planes out of the sky like King Kong, or trying to catch hold of them to pull her away with them.

I burst out unthinkingly, “Don’t cry!”

She turned to look for me. She didn’t lower her arm.

“*Ne pleure pas!*” I repeated in French, because it was the only other language I had a chance in.

She answered me in French that was worse than mine, heavily accented and without any real grammatical connections.

“It hurts me that I do not know the planes. These are new since I became a prisoner. The big ones are maybe American? I do not know. They could be my own; I would not know. It always makes me cry.”

“They’re American,” I agreed.

She lowered her arm.

“You know this?”

“I’m a pilot.”

She burst out in joyful laughter and swore incomprehensibly in her own language. Then she took five long strides over the huddled bodies between us and came to lie down next to me—on her back beside me, squeezed in between me and Lisette, so that the two of us were lying side by side looking up at the sky like stargazers on a beach.

“American planes,” she said. “What kind of planes?”

“The big ones—” I didn’t know the French for “bomber,” either, so I just said it in English. “The big ones, the bombers, are B-17s, Flying Fortresses.”

“Four engines,” she added. You could see them.

“Wright Cyclone engines,” I told her. “Crew of ten. The little planes, what-do-you-call-them, I don’t know the French for ‘fighters,’ I think Mustangs.”

She hugged me passionately, and I gave a surprised yell of agony as my hands got knocked out from beneath my thighs

and my backside hit the rough ground.

“Oh! What?”

“*Fünfundzwanzig*,” I gasped. “Last week.”

“Sorry!”

She inched away respectfully. She knew it was pointless to try to help (she did know how it felt). She said, “I am Irina Korsakova.”

Róza, flat on her face beside me, hissed, “Don’t talk to her—Russian scum!”

The timing was bad for Róza and Irina. Usually the Poles and the Russians in Block 32 got along pretty well—they were united in their disdain of the French, who were shy about undressing and rouged their faces with carefully saved slivers of beetroot. Block 32 was split down the middle with the French all on one side and the Russians and Poles on the other. But when Irina first threw herself into our row, the Warsaw Uprising had just come to a disastrous conclusion, and all summer the Soviets had done a lousy job of giving the Poles any useful support. When the Germans finally beat the rebellion down, they practically destroyed the city—Block 32 knew perfectly well what was happening because imprisoned Polish women and children from Warsaw had been pouring into Ravensbrück for the past two weeks. So when I met Róza, she was holding a grudge against the whole of the USSR. Also, she was just by nature a jealous little thing.

On the other side of me, Irina asked in a bored voice, “What did the fucking Rabbit say about me?”

“She told me not to talk to you.”

They had a brief argument in Russian (I think), spitting and hissing like a pair of cats.

“Fucking Poles,” Irina said to me in French.

“What?” I asked. “What did you say? What did she say?”

“Fucking Russians,” Róza half translated. (Róza taught me to swear like a sailor in about half a dozen European languages. The Polish students from Lublin spoke *everything*. It made me feel so stupid sometimes, this uneducated American who could only speak English and barely scrape by in French.)

“Go ahead and talk to her,” Róža sneered permission. “Witch. That’s what the Germans call those Soviet girl pilots—*Nacht Hexen*. ‘Night Witches.’ Go ahead and listen to her propaganda.”

I couldn’t imagine what kind of propaganda I was going to get from a girl who’d been in prison so long it had turned her hair white. In all the time I knew Irina, I never heard her say the words *communist* or *party* without turning away from me and spitting. But most of the Russian women at Ravensbrück were Red Army soldiers. Irina was a little different.

Her lanky height and hollowed face and white crew cut gave her the look of a grim, battle-worn king—Macbeth, maybe—someone competent and ruthless and experienced.

“I’m not a Night Witch,” Irina murmured low in my ear. “I never flew those tired old sewing machines except when I was training students. I am in Soviet Air Force 296 Regiment, based at Stalingrad. Men and a few women, flying Yaks, chasing together.”

“Chasing together?” I pictured a school dance, everyone running around after other people’s partners. “Chasing what?”

“Chasing the Fascists.” She always said “the Fascists” when she was talking about the Germans. “Chasing Fascist aircraft.”

The French word doesn’t mean *chasing*—it means *hunting*. Irina was a hunter pilot. In English we say *fighter*, not hunter.

She was a combat pilot.

I was so thrilled it took my breath away. It was like meeting Amelia Earhart. Irina was a woman, and a *fighter pilot*.

“What’s your score?” I asked breathlessly.

She hesitated, trying to think of the right word. “Eleven?”

“Eleven?”

That couldn’t be right. Shooting down five enemy aircraft makes you an official ace. She’d said eleven—a *double ace*.

She held her hands up so they were silhouetted black against the bright moonlit sky—ten fingers. Then one more, shaken for emphasis. “Eleven kills. Decorated Hero of the Soviet Union. Have you many kills?” she added casually, as if we were comparing notes. She called them *kills*—a hunter bringing down

prey.

“No, I’m a transport pilot.”

“Why are you here?”

“I was—” I didn’t know the French for “intercepted.” “I was caught—caught in the air by Luftwaffe jets. Jets? Fast planes. I had no guns.”

“When my guns were empty, I made a *taran*. Straight into a Fascist bomber, a fast dive from above. They did not know what hit them. Lost my—” She didn’t know the French for “propeller”—she sketched a tight, fast spinning circle in the air above our faces. “Forced to land in Poland, and Fascist soldiers picked me up with a face full of glass and half my ribs broken.”

“You made a *taran*!”

She must have thought I didn’t know what she meant. She smacked the palm of one hand with the fist of the other. “In the air. Like this—”

Róza’s high voice pitched in suddenly at my other ear in fluent French. “*Taran* is a Polish word.”

“I know! My friend Felicyta told me about it! Aerial ramming!” And in an agony of excitement, I punched a fist at the sky.

Taran. It is the same word in Polish and Russian. There is a technique to it, which Irina showed me—her hands became planes, wings spread and rigid, above our faces in the sky.

Irina had the most beautiful hands!

TRIOLET FOR IRINA (by Rose Justice)

Rigidly spread, like taut wings, fly
her open hands. Above her head
mute ruthless fingers slice the sky
rigidly spread like taut wings, fly
while forty thousand women lie
in frozen cinders, blind with dread,
rigidly spread. Like taut wings fly
her open hands above her head.

(I am amazed I remembered the rhyme scheme for a triolet. Mr. Wagner would be proud of me.)

These are your weapons, Irina's hands told me—pointing with the left, demonstrating with the right. Propeller, fuselage, wing. Go for the enemy wing or rudder, clip it with your own wing or prop.

All around us people were weeping in fear, facedown in the dirt, while Irina's hands flew over our heads. She showed me how she rammed her last kill. Then I showed her how I tipped my V-1 flying bomb.

When the air raid began, anyone who was Camp Police like Karolina had been hustled off to the perimeter ditches to haul sandbags and drag the antiaircraft guns into position; but Róza and Lisette were both watching and helping along the conversation, which was now going on in four languages. I made my hands chase each other in slow motion. My left hand crept up on the right, passed it, slowed down again as the right caught up, four times. Finally, thumb to thumb, wingtip to wingtip, a sliver of space between them, until the slight triumphant moment when the wings caress—

And I dropped my right hand like a falling bomb.

"Again," Irina said. "There was no touch—no contact?"

I showed her how I'd made the other aircraft stall, filling in English words when I didn't know the French. Lisette helped in Russian.

Róza suddenly interrupted in a hiss of a whisper, "*51498!* You told us they arrested you because you landed in the wrong place! Now you're saying it was because *you knocked down a Luftwaffe plane in a taran attack?*"

"Well—I got caught because I was lost. And I got lost because I went chasing after a flying bomb."

"*You knocked down a flying bomb and you landed in one piece on a runway afterward?*"

"Well—" I held my hands up against the sky. "It was the wrong runway."

"Think she's a liar?" Róza asked of no one in particular.

"A good one, if she is," Irina said mildly. "The hands know

what they are talking about.”

“Maybe you’re a liar, too, Russian bat girl.”

“Maybe I am, Polish Rabbit. What do you care? I think I have met another *taran* pilot.”

Two things happened—another wave of American bombers began to whine past overhead, and one of the watchtowers on the concrete walls exploded with machine-gun fire, followed by distant screams.

The guns were aimed at *us*. Or not at us personally—at some of the other prisoners. “*Karolina!*” Lisette gasped in horror.

Instinctively I snatched my hands out of the air and held them tight against my chest. Instinctively Róža grabbed me. Instinctively, on the other side of me, Irina gripped my other hand.

“It’s not Karolina,” Róža insisted, fiercely reassuring. “They’re screaming on the *Appelplatz*, not in the ditches.” The *Appelplatz* was the big open square where the Camp gathered for work details. I don’t know what the prisoners there had done to deserve getting fired at with machine guns. We clung to one another, cowering beneath the invading aircraft and the guns and the sounds of agony on the *Appelplatz*.

Then Irina let go of my hand and held her spread fingers a little bit over our faces, the silhouette of a plane in the dark, and rocked her hand as though she were rocking the wings of an aircraft at me. “*Taran*,” she whispered.

Like Elodie whispering, “*La victoire!*” A secret sign of hope, of the slow, inevitable end to this NEVERENDING WAR.

I rocked my own hand above our faces in the dark for a silent reply.

“*Taran*,” I whispered back.

Irina invaded our bunk. There wasn’t even much of a fight. Some of the Russian prisoners had been put on night work, and it was less crowded in the bunks than it had been—at least, in ours there were only me and Lisette and Róža before Irina turned up.

“What’s the ugly Russian bat girl doing here?” Karolina asked, crawling back in exhausted ten minutes after the rest of us. (She asked it in Polish, but I *know* that’s more or less what she was asking.)

“She’s Rose’s friend,” said Róža. “They’re both aerial combat aces. And I am the prima ballerina of the Warsaw Ballet. Let her stay—she’ll protect you from the other Russian pigs.”

Do you know what I ended up with stuck in my head?

*“Make new friends
But keep the old,
One is silver
And the other gold!”*

Six hours later the clear sky was gone, and I stood for roll call in the pouring rain, eaten up with anxiety over the thought of all those young American bomber pilots having to fly home through such spectacularly horrible weather. I wasn’t paying any attention to the SS guard screaming incomprehensible numbers in German.

*“Französisch politischer Häftling
Einundfünzigtausendvierhundertachtundneunzig! Die Verfügbar!”* she yelled. She advanced on our row like a turkey buzzard, red in the face with rain streaming from her black cape. Her awful dog tried unsuccessfully to shake itself dry all over our entire row.

“That’s you, my dear,” Lisette whispered from the other side of Irina. “She wants an ‘Available.’ *Verfügbar*.”

No one else looked up. No one else even said anything, not daring to risk the narrowest chance of punishment with the dog standing there, grinning savagely at us.

“Die Verfügbar!” the buzzard-woman screeched again. *“Häftling Einundfünzigtausendvierhundertachtundneunzig!”*

Róža gave me a little push. “Available 51498.” I stepped out of line feeling like I was going to my doom. Róža’s words from my first day in Block 32 rattled in my head: *You have to line up*

in the morning and go wherever they send you. Shoveling shit, maybe, or burning corpses. Anything. Usually things nobody else wants to do.

The guard looked me over, then glanced at Irina standing there next to my empty place in line, her gaunt six-foot frame towering over tiny Róza. The guard beckoned to Irina with a royal shake of her head. Irina tried to protest—she wasn't an Available. She was supposed to work in the power plant with a bunch of other Russian girls.

The guard couldn't have cared less what Irina was supposed to be doing. She slapped Irina in the face for protesting and herded her out of line to join me. Then she drove us both ahead of her through the gate in the chain-link fence that separated our block from the rest of the Camp. Standing woefully soaked and miserable out there was a group of a dozen other Availables, waiting for me and Irina to join them in some unknown backbreaking and nasty work assignment.

The guard turned us over to our group leader, a German *Kolonka* (*Kolonka* is a Ravensbrück word, short for something I can't remember, but basically means "forewoman")—the *Kolonka* wasn't an SS guard, but a German prisoner. She wore a green triangle and a red armband. The red armband showed she was a forewoman and let her go anywhere she wanted. The green triangle showed she was a criminal. One of the very first things Róza had told me was how a German criminal with a red armband was exactly the worst combination of work leader, and to my utter terror, this one homed in on me right away.

She was nearly as tall as Irina. She had the stub of an unlit cigarette clamped in the corner of her mouth, and she barked orders around it like a gangster. I stood quivering as she pinpointed me to question on the first day I turned up in her work crew. Right there in the pouring rain she pointed to the letters Elodie had embroidered in my sleeve patch. "USA?" she asked curiously.

"Ich bin Amerikanerin," I explained.

In perfect, almost unaccented English, she asked, "Why are you here?" She had intense pale green eyes the exact color of a Coca-Cola bottle. I didn't answer, and she shrugged a little. "Just wondering. I don't give a shit why you're here. I went to

college in America. But you're the first American I've seen in Ravensbrück." Then she began firing these weird, casual, ordinary questions at me. "Have you ever been to Chicago?"

I swallowed, at sea as to where this was going. I gave her terse, suspicious answers.

"I stayed overnight once."

"Who's your favorite bandleader?"

"Um—Tommy Dorsey?"

"Do you know a recipe for Boston cream pie?"

I shook my head.

"Too bad!" She twisted her mouth in disappointment. "I'd give a lot to get a recipe for Boston cream pie. Don't worry, I'm not going to report you for being American. If you don't understand anything I say in German, just ask. Now I'm going to shout at you all to straighten up and get moving, okay? French morons."

And she did, just launched into a long tirade of orders in German.

French morons? I wondered.

Irina, who was Russian, was in line next to me. I stole a glance at the girl walking ahead of her, whose left sleeve I could see pretty well. Her red triangle had a defiant black *F* embroidered in it the way Elodie had embroidered hers, and I could just make out the number above her political prisoner patch—51444. She was from my original French transport.

Then I tried to check the other women around me. I could see the numbers of the two ahead of me—we were all from the same transport. None of them was Elodie, but they were from Elodie's transport.

Elodie! I thought, my heart lifting in the ridiculous way it did at any faint promise of hope—a tattered kite soaring and going nowhere. Elodie, my comrade-in-arms from the first three weeks in quarantine! Maybe I could get a message to Elodie!

Our German *Kolonka* barked another incomprehensible order at us, then unexpectedly followed up with a quiet translation first in French and then in English. "Stay over this side. Don't go near the tent. *Don't look.*"

We tried not to look. But the tent was between us and wherever we were going, and we couldn't help *seeing*.

It was as big as a circus tent and had been put up while I was still in quarantine, in an open place too marshy to build on, as a temporary shelter for the new prisoners who were pouring into Ravensbrück every day—thousands of civilians from beaten Warsaw, from Auschwitz as they started to evacuate it before the Red Army got there, and from a ton of other camps and prisons closer to the Front as they moved people around. You could see the tent from inside the fence around Block 32, but I hadn't paid much attention to it while I'd been working with the knitters. Today there were more guards and dogs than usual all around the tent perimeter, keeping people inside, and the reason everyone in there was trying to get out in the rain was because they were dying of thirst.

Really dying of it, I think.

Hands and arms and heads stuck out anywhere there was a gap—cupped hands collecting rainwater, some holding bowls or even just a piece of cloth to collect moisture—I saw one woman lying on her back with her hair in the black cinder mud at the tent's edge, her mouth open, letting a rivulet of water stream down the canvas and into her mouth.

You know, it set you at war with yourself.

A back-of-my-mind part of me wanted to help—the Lutheran-church-bred Girl Scout in me wanted to race back and forth with buckets of water for everybody.

But another back-of-my-mind part of me, cowed and self-centered, was going, *Thank GOD I am in Block 32. Thank GOD I am not in that tent.*

And the front of my mind—the biggest part of me—was just screaming over and over in denial and disbelief, *WHAT AM I DOING HERE?*

"Don't look," the German *Kolonka* advised again, and then her voice suddenly went hard and flat. "Oh, what the hell, go ahead and look. If they throw any bodies out of the tent, we'll probably have to pick them up. But stay on this side just now!"

There were twelve of us, all with numbers in the 51000s except for Irina and the *Kolonka*, and when we got to work I realized that what we had in common was our height—all of us were tall. That's why the guard had pulled Irina out of line on a whim when she'd come to get me that morning.

The *Kolonka* wasn't kidding about picking up bodies. We got marched down the main street of the Camp, the *Lagerstrasse*, to a depot. There we collected half a dozen handcarts, and then our very first job was clearing the top bunks in the *Revier*, the sick bay, which shorter women couldn't see or reach as easily as we could. We left the carts standing at the back door of the *Revier* and lined up to go in. The *Kolonka* pulled the neck of her dress up over her nose like a gas mask and yelled another order at us through the blue-and-gray striped cloth, and we marched inside like we were going to war. The stench was unbelievable. Within seconds we all had our dresses pulled up over our noses.

And I do not remember what we did.

I *know* what we did, of course, and I remember doing the same thing later—we moved hundreds of corpses this winter. We lifted them out of the bunks and undressed them. We stacked them in rows on the floor of the mortuary. We carried them out to our handcarts and hauled them to the crematorium and unloaded them again. But I don't remember the first time I did it. It was worse doing it for the first time. And I have blocked it out.

This is what I do remember about that first day of work as an Available: just before we marched back to our blocks for the six o'clock roll call, our *Kolonka* assembled us in the washroom of the *Revier* and gave us each a vitamin C tablet out of a green triangular package.

"These are from the Swiss Red Cross, and yes, they're stolen. Take them *now*—nothing leaves this room. Any of you breathe a word and I'll get you transferred to the Punishment Block. Not the Bunker—don't expect a cozy private cell with nothing to do all day. You'll be digging toilet pits and hauling road rollers."

She didn't have to threaten us again. Even I knew already what the Punishment Block was, and it wasn't the extra hard and filthy work people dreaded about being sent there. The

women in the Punishment Block were known for being the nastiest people in the Camp. Probably with good reason, but you didn't want to have to fight for sleeping space or food with someone who'd kick you under the bunks and steal your bowl and make you buy it back with your bread ration for the entire week.

The *Kolonka* watched us all closely while we swallowed the vitamins, her pale green eyes narrow with suspicion. Suddenly she advanced on Irina. She seized hold of Irina's jaw and rammed her head back against the tiled wall, pinching her nostrils closed and holding a hand over her mouth.

"*Häftling Einundfünfzigtausendvierhundertachtundneunzig!*" the *Kolonka* rapped out over her shoulder. Prisoner 51498! Me. I stepped forward fearfully.

"Does this bitch understand anything but Russian?"

I gulped. "A little French."

"*Swallow!*" the *Kolonka* ordered Irina in French, punctuating her command by bashing the back of Irina's skull against the wall. Irina choked and spluttered and finally swallowed.

The German girl turned around and told us, "No hiding stolen vitamin pills under your tongue to take to your friends back in your block. I'm not being nice or doing you a favor. I'm taking care of myself. No one on my team gets scurvy. Line up!"

We lined up meekly.

"My name's Anna," she growled at us. It seemed like an odd thing to finish up with. I think it was the closest she could come to an apology.

"So what did they make you do?" Róza asked cheerfully as we scrambled to get our tepid soup that evening.

My hands were shaking. Karolina put her own hand under my bowl so I didn't spill anything.

"We were working in the *Revier*. Irina tried to organize vitamins for you," I told Róza. "She got bashed in the head for it."

"For *me*? Really, Russian Bat Girl?"

Irina shrugged. “No, not for you, Rabbit. If I got away with it, I would have sold them.”

“Can you get calcium tablets?” Lisette asked.

Irina shot me a warning glance that said clearly, *Shut up or Anna will get you transferred to the Punishment Block*. But Lisette wouldn’t let it go, and after we’d all squeezed into our spot under the end of the table and she’d said her grace in Polish, she said to me again, “Calcium tablets.”

“Why calcium?” I asked.

“For the Rabbits who have had bone operations. For Róža, so she doesn’t break her leg walking on the damaged bone. It can happen. Calcium helps make bones stronger.”

I thought about it for a minute. Anna was like a guard dog—trained to be vicious, but maybe if you handled her the right way... *I’d give a lot to get a recipe for Boston cream pie*, she’d said.

Irina caught my eye and raised two fingers to her lips, miming smoking.

She was right—I was ready to bet Anna could be bribed with cigarettes. Except for Irina, the other girls on my work team were all from my original transport. If they were still sharing bunks with Elodie, if they were still in the same block with her and she was still alive, maybe one of them could carry a message to her—I felt sure Elodie was capable of organizing cigarettes for me to give to Anna.

“We’ll work on it,” I said.

The next morning Irina and I joined the tall French girls again and marched through the mud past the tent, with Anna marching next to our column, where she could keep an eye on us. Irina stood between me and Anna to hide the fact that I had a whole day’s bread ration hidden in the blouse of my dress, about a quarter of a loaf. That was the standard unit of Camp currency, a day’s bread ration, and we’d scraped it together in anticipation of our great calcium caper.

Hope—you think of hope as a bright thing, a strong thing, sustaining. But it’s not. It’s the opposite. It’s simply this: lumps of stale bread stuck down your shirt. Stale gray bread eked out

with ground fish bones, which you won't eat because you're going to give it away, and maybe you'll get a message through to your friend. *That's all you need.*

God, I was hungry.

I don't mean I was more hungry that day than I'd been the day before. I mean I was constantly, hopelessly, stupefyingly hungry. I said earlier I can't remember when I first felt that way—though I know I wasn't able to eat much right after I got out of the Bunker, I don't remember ever *not* being hungry. The thing is, when you're that hungry it's almost impossible to think about anything else. You know you ought to, and you want to, and sometimes you're forced to. Calcium and cigarettes. Air raids. Feeling sorry for the people who are dying of thirst and the half-human *schmootzich* beggars licking spilled soup off the kitchen steps. But it takes an effort.

We got marched past the tent, past the Bunker and the sick bay and kitchens and out through the main gate, but without our handcarts this time. Then we went around the walls toward the crematorium, the path we'd taken with the corpses yesterday, and I had a bad moment thinking they'd make us work at the incinerator ovens today. But we passed the crematorium and ended up in the building next to it, a long shed with a sort of huge garage door entrance. It was being used as a storage area for building and maintenance equipment. Our team of Tall, Strong Amazons was supposed to clear it out.

The shed was full of tools, shovels, long lengths of rail, stuff like that. I don't think I could ever in a million years describe what it was like for me and three other underfed girls to pick up a steel rail—two of us on each end—and carry it on our shoulders to a pile by the train tracks. If any one of us had dropped her end, or stumbled, our feet would have all been crushed.

Irina and I worked together, but on our third rail we somehow got swapped around with a couple of the French girls, and I ended up next to Prisoner 51444.

"I have some of your things," she muttered suddenly. "Your friend Elodie sent them."

We were at the unloading point and let our end of rail

come thundering down into the muddy ground. We had to shift the rail over to line it up, and the girl hissed in my ear as we worked, “Wait till we’re back in the shed. I’ll hand them over.”

Hope is the most treacherous thing in the *world*. It lifts you and lets you plummet. But as long as you’re being lifted, you don’t worry about plummeting.

“I have bread for you to give Elodie,” I whispered back. “Can she get me some cigarettes?”

51444 gave a panicked, explosive laugh. “What if I eat the bread myself?”

I hissed in her ear, “You won’t. You just said you’re Elodie’s messenger.” I hazarded wildly, “You can have half.”

“I’m Micheline,” she said.

Later on, she stumbled against me and grabbed at my arm for support, and suddenly I was holding something soft and silky balled up in the palm of my hand.

I stuffed the silky wad into the neck of my dress and gave her the bread.

I didn’t know what she’d pressed into my hand until I got back to Block 32 that night and had a chance to look. It turned out to be my hose. Elodie had sent me my stockings! They were actually little socks that she’d made out of my hose. She’d been put to work in one of the workshops where they repurposed everybody’s clothes, and she’d got hold of my torn nylons and cut them into pieces and made me three little pairs of socks—they just slipped over your feet so they’d be hidden by your shoes. I hope she kept a few pairs back for herself.

And—this is so Elodie—she’d embroidered a tiny rosebud on the instep of each one. The thread was from my own dress, the one I was still wearing, from the same ball of thread we’d unraveled from the torn collar when we were together in quarantine. A little blue rose on each foot.

Oh, wonderful Elodie!

Three pairs of nylon socks. If I’d worn all three on top of each other, my feet would have *still* been cold—but of course I gave a pair to Róza. And another to Lisette. I passed them around under the table when we’d finished eating. Lisette tried to give hers to Karolina—Karolina wouldn’t take them. They

had a fight over them. Or rather, Karolina refused heatedly. Lisette just kept calmly insisting, “I won’t wear this newfangled nylon, my dear, so you may as well have them.”

“*Idiots*,” Róža blazed. “Give them all to me if you’re going to be stupid!”

“Take turns,” Irina suggested as though she couldn’t care less.

I am almost ashamed to write this down, but it never occurred to me I could have given away all three pairs. Not till this minute. I gave a pair to Róža because she couldn’t walk. I gave a pair to Lisette because she was the mother of our Camp Family, and I’d been told to treat her like my mother. And I kept one for myself because they were *mine* and my feet were cold. Irina, I figured, was perfectly capable of organizing socks for herself, and Karolina—well, Karolina kept insisting she wasn’t a cripple, and I didn’t want to offend her.

And anyway, she was just so delighted by my fire-engine-red toenails when I put on the little nylon slipper socks for the first time that she didn’t care about her own feet.

“*Nail varnish!*” Karolina hissed in delight. “You are a *painted woman!* No wonder they slapped you with a French prisoner’s triangle!”

It is true. The nail polish for my date with Nick still hadn’t come off. My toenails had grown out a bit, so there was a bare gap between the nail bed and the enamel, but if you didn’t look too close and you didn’t look at the skin of my blistered feet, my toenails were still pretty.

Róža rolled her eyes. “Karolina is the vainest creature in the world. Last time she tried to grow her hair out they made her wear a sign that said ‘I have violated Camp rules by curling my hair.’”

“*Shut up*, Różyczka. What’s the color called? The color of the varnish?”

“Cherry Soda,” I said. “It was a little bottle I brought with me from America.”

Karolina and Róža both sighed in ecstasy.

“*Cherry Soda!* No wonder your toes look like balls of candy.”

"My mother never let me wear makeup—*ever*," Róza vowed with vivid envy.

"You were fourteen when you were arrested!" I protested. "My mother didn't let me wear makeup, either, when I was fourteen!"

"Did you paint them yourself or was it done by a beauty specialist? How long does it last? What shoes did you wear with it? Were they open-toed—could you see your toenails with your shoes on?"

"Sandals. It was for a date with my boyfriend, Nick."

"Did he like them?"

I shrugged and looked away. I don't think he'd noticed them. It wasn't the first time I'd thought of Nick, and the thought of him always made me ache. What would he *think* if he could see me now? There wasn't any way I could ever be mistaken for anything but a concentration camp prisoner, hairless, in my torn dress with its missing collar and big mismatched fabric X's and the brown striped bloodstains across my backside. Early on I used to dream about him, though I stopped dreaming about anything but food after a while—I dreamed he was touching my head and asking, "Where is your hair?"

Karolina stifled a giggle. "Let's name your toes. That'd be a hilarious little cartoon, a row of dancing toes like the Rockettes! Each a different flavor. Cherry! Peppermint!"

"Red currant!" said Lisette.

"Beetroot," said Irina.

"Beetroot!" Róza sneered.

"It is sweet. And red."

They coaxed me into putting the rhymes together.

"Strawberry, cranberry—"

"—grenadine, raspberry!"

And I made a rhyme about painted toes. It is a sort of insanely starved person's version of "This Little Piggy."

No penny candy
so stubbornly sweet

as plops of red sugar
adorning my feet—
strawberry, cinnamon,
red currant, cranberry,
peppermint, sugar beet,
grenadine, raspberry,
cherry, and mulberry—
come look at Rose
and join in the feast
of my lollipop toes!

Of course it was not just the illicit beauty of my toes that everyone admired—it was also, and in a big way, the fact that they looked so edible.

I wasn't the only one who'd been scavenging that day. Irina turned out to have an entire newspaper hidden in her shirt. She must have picked it up in the maintenance shed we'd been working in, though I hadn't noticed a thing at the time (she was fantastic at organizing paper, it turned out). As we were climbing into the bunks, just before the lights went out, she pressed most of the paper thin and hid it wedged between the bunk slats and frame. But one last piece she twitched in front of Róža's nose, and when she'd got Róža's attention, folded the scrap of paper while we watched.

It was only about as wide as her palm. Her hands moved so quickly you couldn't follow what she was doing. Oh, Irina's hands were pretty! And suddenly she'd transformed a yellowed corner of a stolen Nazi newspaper into a little paper airplane with short, broad wings. She held it out to Róža.

"Fly this," Irina said. She mimed the action of throwing a dart.

Róža lifted the paper plane toward the ceiling and pitched it across the bunks. She didn't even throw it very hard, but it glided away into the gloom, and after a moment someone threw it back with a sharp cautionary warning in Polish. It flew better than any paper airplane I had ever seen.

"I like to fly them over the walls," Irina said. "When no one

is looking.”

You know how I stood in roll calls making up poems to keep from going crazy with fear and boredom? Irina made up aircraft.

That was a good day, nylon socks and painted toes and Irina’s first paper airplane. Some of the ones she made later Karolina decorated—she’d put Nick as the pilot, though of course she didn’t know what he looked like. He was our hero—I whispered stories about Nick to Karolina and Róža after lights-out, where he’d come to rescue us, sneaking into the power plant with wire cutters and disabling the electric fences, carrying a knapsack full of chocolate bars. Karolina made him look like Clark Gable. Or she’d draw caricatures of us on Irina’s planes, with Irina and me in the cockpit and Karolina and Róža and Lisette as our passengers. They were very funny and she could do them *so fast*—sometimes when we were standing in a roll call she’d make doodles of the turkey buzzard guards with her toes in the cinders at our feet. Just a couple of broad swipes and you’d see it and you’d have to pretend to sneeze so you didn’t burst out laughing. And then she’d kick it into dust before she got caught.

Oh, God, dry words on a page. How can you grow to love a handful of strangers so fiercely just because you have to sleep on the same couple of wooden planks with them, when half the time you were there you wanted to strangle them, and all you ever talked about is death and imaginary strawberries?

“Rose, let’s make a book,” Róža whispered to me as we lay sleepless and shivering and scratching in the restless dark. “I want to do something like your poems. Karolina makes moving pictures, Irina makes planes—I want to *make* something. So you could write the poems in English and I could translate them into Polish—a kind of memory book—”

“We could get everybody to do her own memory!”

“A page for each of us, for each of the Rabbits—”

“Your whole transport. The whole Lublin Transport.”

“Yes, the ones who have been murdered, too. We’ll have photos of them as civilians—you’ll have to track those down after you get out, okay?”

“We’ll need paper.”

“And recipes! We can get a recipe from everybody!”

“*Paper.*”

“Irina can organize some paper for us. It will be better than just a list of names—it will be about *people.*”

Our *Blockova*, Gitte, came crashing through the evening soup squabble, like a speedboat plowing up waves in the Arctic, tagging people. Karolina Salska was one of them.

“*You’re on tomorrow’s list.*” Half a dozen of us heard the icy whisper. There was no reason I should know what she meant, but I knew. I knew intuitively, along with everybody else who had experience of what it meant, and the hair stood up all down my spine.

“No!” Lisette gasped fiercely. “They’re not going to execute any more Rabbits.”

“That’s why I’m telling you now,” Gitte said. “There are seven from my block on the list. We’ll hide you all in the tent with the transfer prisoners.”

Block 32 was tucked away in a southern spur of the Camp, in a corner, which gave us a sort of “back to the wall” advantage sometimes—we always knew when anyone was coming for us because they could only approach from one direction. And it was right next to the tent. I hadn’t ever thought about that being an advantage.

When Gitte said about hiding in the tent, Lisette went white. And then her face closed down. “They’ll miss us at roll call. They pull you out of the morning roll call. They’ll pull someone else out instead.”

“They’ll know we’re hiding people, but what else can we do? We’ve got to show them we’re not going to give you up without another fight. They don’t like it when we fight back. Too many people find out.”

Karolina, also white, asked, “How will we get in the tent?”

“The fence gate’s still open. I’ll let you out now.”

The Block 32 numbers didn’t come out right in that night’s roll call—no surprise. They shouted and hustled the dogs

around us and checked our numbers about a hundred times. We had to stand there with our arms at our sides, looking straight ahead.

They made us stand there for a solid day.

When they made you stand there for hours and hours like that as punishment, they called it *Strafstehe*n. Punishment standing. But this time it was *different*. It was the worst *Strafstehe*n of the whole time I was there, the longest and the hungriest; but it didn't feel like punishment. It felt like a battle.

All night, all the next day, and past lights-out the next night—with nothing to eat and nothing to drink. It wasn't the coldest day we ever had to stand out there for hours and hours, but it was November now and it was darned cold. It snowed for most of the afternoon, squally blowing flurries that didn't stick. They let us march in place because the one thing they couldn't stop us from doing was shuffling our feet to keep warm. I held my breath and let it out slowly, watching how it made a little cloud in front of my face, amazed there was enough warmth somewhere deep inside my body that the air in me could condense into cloud on its way out.

People started to collapse. Róza collapsed. Irina and I pulled her to her feet. Róza tried to fall over again on purpose, throwing her full weight into it, but she weighed *nothing*. We linked our arms through hers to keep her up. Lisette gave a sob and Irina risked hissing a command in Russian at Róza to get her to behave—none of us wanted an SS guard to notice us.

But it was *different*. We had a purpose—we had a mission. We were standing there because we were *fighting*. Maybe if we'd given up the seven hiding in the tent they'd have let us go earlier. But none of us gave up *anybody*.

At midday, in the snow flurries, we heard the gunshots over the walls—they always took people outside the Camp to shoot them. Three. There were supposed to be ten. Our seven didn't get shot.

They let us go, I think, because they'd grown sick of guarding us. We staggered in a wild rush for the faucets in the washroom and handed out water to each other in bowls and buckets and tin cups, all of us crazed with thirst. Lisette

stripped off her messed-up underpants and ran water through them and put them back on wet. We piled into the bunks, hundreds of us climbing over one another in the dark, and collapsed in gasping, clinging bundles of misery. The snow turned into rain again, pattering on the wooden roof. It sounded just like the rain on the sleeping porch.

“Don’t cry, don’t cry, don’t cry,” Róza chanted in my ear, under her breath. “We won, we won, we won. Don’t cry.”

“We won?” I echoed, stupefied.

“*We won*. Not like last time, when they shut us all in the block for three days in August with the windows closed, and we nearly suffocated, and then they threw us into the Bunker and operated on us there instead of in the *Revier*. Oh—Lisette—which was worse, standing in the snow till you turned into a block of ice or being slowly roasted alive? Remember that day we had one cup of water between the five of us till it got dark and you made us share it out by dipping our fingers in it?”

“Holy Mary, you stupid Rabbit, shut up and go to sleep.” Irina yawned. “They will get us up again in three hours.”

“*We won*,” Róza rasped in my ear, and it was the last thing I heard, and then I was unconscious.

“No coffee this morning.”

Róza collapsed in mirth. “*No coffee!* That’s one hell of a punishment. Wow, what did we get yesterday? I don’t remember any *coffee*. What did we get the day before? Was that *coffee?*”

Our daily dose of “coffee” at six a.m. was brown and lukewarm and tasted of nothing. It was the idea of coffee, though, brown and lukewarm. We’d stood in the snow for over twenty-four hours, we’d slept for three hours, we’d stood in the drizzling, freezing dark for another two hours, and then we had no coffee. And then they sent us all back to work, even though that morning’s roll call hadn’t come out right, either.

The real miracle is that we didn’t all kill one another that morning and save them the trouble of their executions.

The whole week that Karolina and the six other condemned

Rabbits were hiding, Irina and I had to go back each day to our weird work crew of tall girls, doing jobs that shorter people couldn't do as easily as we could—dismantling shelves, boarding up broken windows, carrying stacks of boxes—clearing top bunks of people who'd died in the night, especially in the *Revier*, where people were too sick to do it themselves.

Anna, the *Kolonka* with the green badge and green eyes, was contemptuously familiar with the *Revier* because she'd worked in it before. She took over the back washroom to use as a temporary morgue because the real one was always too full. She'd stand guard at the door by the sinks to make sure we had the place to ourselves and get a conversation going with me in English so she could pretend not to see if some of us sneaked a dead woman's wooden comb or a pair of socks down our blouses. I never took anybody's clothes. I couldn't bear the thought of wearing some dead girl's socks fresh off her dead feet. I had other things to think about, anyway: Elodie had managed to smuggle me five tiny cigarettes via Micheline, something that looked like tobacco rolled in thin airmail paper, and I was waiting for my moment to try to bargain with Anna for the calcium.

The only thing Anna ever wanted to talk about with me was American food. Popcorn and root beer and hot dogs with mustard and relish and sauerkraut. (She'd been to a ball game once.) Gosh knows what I will eat when I get home—anything I talked about in the shower room with Anna will taste like sawdust and fill me with nausea.

"Do you have pork barbecue in Pennsylvania?" she asked breathlessly. "When I was in Chicago, there was a diner we used to go to after the lab shut, and they had these fluffy white bread rolls that they baked themselves, and they'd pile the meat in with an ice-cream scoop—"

She broke off with a sob, and suddenly we were *both crying over pork barbecue*. Abruptly we turned our backs on each other at exactly the same moment. I stopped crying first. I spun around and said, "Calcium. I'll write you out a pork barbecue recipe if you can get me calcium tablets."

"Calcium!"

"Isn't that good for bones? My friend had her bones broken

here.”

“Oh.”

The German *Kolonka* went tight-lipped. She thought about it for a moment.

“Not tablets. She’ll need injections—calcium gluconate. You’re friends with the Rabbits, huh?”

Anna had a guilty secret—before she’d been sent to Ravensbrück as a prisoner, she’d worked at Ravensbrück as an employee.

After a lot of wheeling and dealing, I got the dirty story and the calcium out of her in exchange for the cigarettes, the promise of two bread rations, and Mother’s *fasnacht* recipe. I tempted her into that one by mentioning how Mother and I had spent two days making deep-fried doughnuts for the church sale for Fasnacht Day, the last day before Lent. Anna let me sit on one of the filthy sinks in the converted washroom-turned-mortuary for a couple of minutes before I started to take the clothes off that day’s corpses so the rest of my crew could cart them off to the incinerator. For a few seconds she watched me writing my recipe against the tiled wall with a stolen pencil stub, and then she just suddenly began talking.

“You might as well know because if your Rabbits *ever* find out who I am, they’ll never trust you again,” she said, leaning against the other sink and smoking furiously. “I’m a pharmacist. I got a job here in 1941, requisitioning drugs and bandages—antiseptic, aspirin, glucose, things for the sick bay. Just stocktaking, really, because I’m not a nurse. I was here in 1942 when they did the first operations on the Polish girls. I *saw* what they did. I wasn’t involved at first; I just tiptoed around behind the scenes making sure there was fresh plaster for the casts and that the knives were sharp. It was my *job*.”

My hand stuck in the middle of a sentence that began, *The day before you’re going to cook, wash and peel a bushel of potatoes, then—*

I couldn’t write the word *cut*. I think I left it out. Actually, the writing had now become an excuse so I didn’t have to look at her.

“So, I did my job,” she went on. “At first I didn’t have to go

near the—um, the patients. I got my backside pinched by the doctors now and then because I was a pretty German patriot and not a Polish Special Transport Ravensbrück scarecrow condemned to death and good for nothing but scientific experimentation, but I didn't *enjoy* knowing what was going on, you know? I didn't feel proud to be advancing medical research, and I didn't believe we *were*, anyway. They were sloppy about monitoring the experiments, and sometimes they never followed up on them. And I didn't *like* my work enough to want to do it well myself." She let out a gasp of smoke. "You wouldn't believe the shitty jobs I've had to do in the last three years. This"—she waved her cigarette at the bony corpses stacked against the wall in the unused shower stalls—"this is harmless. Stripping dead bodies—not much fun but harmless. Sharpening knives that you know are going to be used to carve up some kid's tibia and fibula so they can swap pieces of them around—that's hard to justify."

She asked suddenly, "Are you listening?"

The scrap of paper slid out from beneath my pencil stub and fluttered into the sink. "Of course I'm listening."

"They'd give the girls ether before they operated on them and inject them with Evipan to knock them out. One day, the usual nurse assistant wasn't there for some reason, and they got me to step in for her. Those poor kids knew by then what was going to happen to them, but they really *were* like rabbits—just so glad to get a bath and clean sheets to sleep in, so it *must* be okay, right? Afterward, after they woke up and the anesthetic wore off and the fever and infection set in and they couldn't even see what had happened, because they were up to their hips in plaster, they'd lie there screaming or sobbing or begging for lemonade—*lemonade!*" She gave a hoarse bark of laughter. "I stole morphine for them. I'd go around injecting them when no one was looking. They called me the Angel of Sleep. I didn't try to talk to them—they all hated me like poison because they knew I'd helped put some of them under for the operations. But they took the morphine when I could get it."

Anna took another drag on her cigarette. It was nearly done. We could risk only another minute or two—maybe less, if someone brought another body in.

“So, well, then I got transferred to an office job for the Occupation army in France for a while because they needed a pharmacist and a driver and a translator, and they got all three for the price of one by hiring me. I thought that job would be better, but it turned out worse, so then I got transferred back to Berlin, and my new boss got mad at me because I wouldn’t fuck him. So he gave me a choice—strip for him or go back to Ravensbrück, as a prisoner this time. He thought he had a sure winner with that one, seeing as I’d *been* to Ravensbrück and knew what I was getting into, but actually I was fed up with playing their game by then. I’d seen a lot of...things I didn’t like. And I didn’t want to spread my legs for him *at all, ever*, and I knew that I’d be a *Kolonka* or a *Blockova* here—and also, when I’d been here before, it was run like a soldiers’ camp, much cleaner and more orderly—we used to show it off to the Red Cross—none of these *schmootzichs* grabbing at your bread, no shithole tent full of evacuees from other camps, only two to a bunk and enough blankets and toilets that worked. So, yeah, that was my choice.”

There wasn’t a thing left of her cigarette but a damp shred of stolen onionskin typing paper, which she spat into the sink.

“The bastard raped me anyway before he arrested me. The fucking *bastard*. He had to get help from a bunch of his pals because I fought back. I got convicted of assaulting my boss.” She pointed to her green triangle. “German criminal, right? So I’m back in the *Revier* at Ravensbrück, where I started. Okay, I’ll get you some calcium injections. But don’t you ever tell anybody who you get them from. Much better they don’t know I’m a fellow prisoner now.”

I nodded. I held up the crumpled scrap of paper with the half-finished *fasnacht* recipe.

“I’m not done.”

“Do it next time.”

We hid the recipe in the quarter-inch gap between the wall and the sink.

Karolina and the other condemned Rabbits were still hiding, and Gitte bargained for them with the Camp authorities. “Take

these seven off the list and the whole Lublin Special Transport will cooperate with you—they'll line up for you in perfect order—they'll testify that they've been treated well—they'll *sign their names* as testimony."

The Lublin Special Transport had refused to do that in the past, and no one really believed they were going to do it now.

In desperation Gitte threatened, "The whole Camp knows. The *whole Camp* knows what happened to the Rabbits. Their names got out before and they'll get out again. If you kill any more of them, *someone* is going to tell the world."

It doesn't sound like much of a threat, does it? *Someone is going to tell the world*. But when the war is over, that stinking Commander and those soulless doctors will all have to get real jobs again, and who will want Doctors Fischer and Gebhardt cutting up their legs after what they did to Róža's? They *knew* what the reaction would be when people found out, when the Allied soldiers found the camps. When people started to ask them to explain, to account for what they'd done. They knew. And they were scared.

"You need to learn our names," Róža whispered as we all struggled to get comfortable in our crowded bunk.

"I know your names."

"*All* our names. You need to learn the list, the list of Rabbits' names. Then, if you get out, you can tell everyone about us. You might be released back to your Air Force, or the Red Cross might come for you. But that won't happen to any of us, because we're all condemned. *Special Transport*. So if you survive the war, you have to tell everyone our names, our full names. All seventy-four of us, the living and dead."

"There were more than that, darling," Lisette reminded her. "Also the German Bible Student and the Ukrainian girl. And the others whose legs they amputated."

"Never mind the amputees," Róža said heartlessly. "They're all dead and no one remembers their names anyway. There are no witnesses and there's no *evidence*."

"*God!*" I exclaimed. "They *amputated* people's legs?"

“Those girls were mentally ill to start with—no one will ever know who they were. Anyway, you’ve seen *us*. You know what happened. You know it was real.”

“Oh, Róża, how can I remember all your names?” I wailed. “I can’t even spell *your* name!”

“In a poem,” said Lisette. “Make a poem for a mnemonic. Make yourself another counting-out rhyme.”

I know the list by heart now, too, their real names. But I started just the way Lisette suggested, by making myself a counting-out rhyme of all their given names. Some of them had the same first name, so I only used each name once in the rhyme to keep it simple. I whispered it to myself in roll call and recited it in my head as I shivered between Róża and Irina in the bunks, my head and stomach aching with hunger, my frozen feet too numb to feel my painted toes.

Izabela, Aniela, Alicia, Eugenia,
Stefania, Rozalia, Pelagia, Irena,
Alfreda, Apolonia, Janina, Leonarda,
Czeslava, Stanislava, Vladyslava, Barbara,
Veronika, Vaclava, Bogumila, Anna,
Genovefa, Helena, Jadviga, Joanna,
Kazimiera, Ursula, Wojciecha, Maria,
Wanda, Leokadia, Krystyna, Zofia.

The seven Rabbits’ names came off the list of people they were going to execute. We were pretty sure it was just a postponement so they could catch us off guard later.

Karolina staggered back to us after nearly a week in the tent, more ravenous than we were and full of news. She’d been talking to the Jewish women in the tent who’d been transferred from Auschwitz.

“They were killing tens of—*tens of thousands* of people there every day this summer,” Karolina stuttered. “TENS OF THOUSANDS. Gassing them and burning the bodies, or just—just burying them in piles when the incinerators got behind—if Fischer hadn’t infected me with gangrene on purpose for no

reason at all, I wouldn't believe the numbers, either. TENS OF THOUSANDS EVERY—EVERY DAY—”

What a meaningless number. It would have wiped out Ravensbrück in a couple of days, and Ravensbrück was enormous. No wonder Karolina was stuttering.

“Ten thousand a day in your dreams,” Róža challenged bitterly. “Who was doing the counting? How *big* is Auschwitz?”

“Bigger than Ravensbrück.” Karolina took a deep breath and crossed her arms over her chest, hugging herself. “Listen, 7705, your number has not come up on the death list yet and you haven't spent a week in that hellhole under the tent. Oh, I want a *bath*—I want to wash my hair! They pile the corpses at one end if no one comes to take them out. They dig gravel and mud out of the ground with their hands to try to cover them up. They have no toilets and they can't go outside. They catch rainwater and snow in the tent flaps or they'd all be dead of thirst. And that is only the ones who are still capable of doing more than rocking back and forth and wailing and trying to eat their own hands—”

Lisette put a gentle arm around Karolina's waist.

“I saw a woman doing that,” Karolina said, shuddering. She shook Lisette off and lowered her voice. “Listen, just before they started evacuating Auschwitz so the Soviets won't be able to liberate it, there was a prisoner rebellion there. In October. The prisoners destroyed one of the crematoriums—they tried to blow up the gas chambers. They killed guards with *hammers*.”

“Where did they get explosive?” Irina asked quietly.

“The women in the munitions factories smuggled gunpowder out to them. It took them months. Hundreds of them escaped—they escaped—” Karolina made a funny noise, a cross between a sob and a laugh. “Of course everybody got caught and they were all shot, two hundred of them in a day. Except the ones who'd planned it, and the women. They were all slammed into the Auschwitz Bunker. You can imagine what's going on there *now*.” She gave that gulping laugh again. “They say the men gave out the women's names. But—but the women aren't giving them *anything*.”

Lisette was listening with twenty kinds of horror—horror at

what had happened, at what was still happening back in Poland, at what was happening under the tent, and mainly at what had happened to Karolina and at the half-crazed way she was telling her stuttering story. But Irina and Róża were listening with ambition and admiration. I could tell. They'd stopped thinking about food for a minute and were thinking about rebellion.

A couple of mornings later, the Camp authorities distributed coats, and that made everyone's hopes soar, too, because we were sure they wouldn't waste winter coats on people they were about to execute. The coats got dumped in big piles outside the chain-link fence around our block, arranged by nationality, with numbers and prisoner patches already sewn on. You were out of luck if your coat didn't fit. Lisette, who was used to dropping her status as honorary Pole whenever they made us line up in national groups, grabbed me by the arm and pulled me to the French pile of coats along with the spies and Resistance couriers in their beetroot rouge.

Not surprisingly, these garments had all seen better days; their linings had all been ripped out, and every coat had had one sleeve ripped off and another sleeve of a wildly contrasting color sewn back in its place, to make them obviously prison coats. We tossed them back and forth, trying to find our own numbers, and suddenly Lisette burst out laughing. She shoved a lightweight pale green wool at me—it had a velvet collar so moth-eaten that no one had bothered to salvage it.

“Come on!” Lisette pulled at my arm again. “Back in line!”

I started to pull on the coat she'd given me and suddenly recognized the navy contrasting sleeve.

It was from my ATA tunic. My USA patch was still in place on the shoulder. That was what had made Lisette laugh.

Wonderful Elodie!

Later, when I had a chance to check out the coat more closely, I discovered that Elodie had tucked my rose hanky from Aunt Rainy into a pocket hidden on the inside. With the blue thread from the collar of my dress she'd embroidered another rose on the hanky in the corner opposite Aunt Rainy's, and on

either side of it she'd put our initials, with a little French flag under the *EF* and a little American flag under the *RJ*.

And she'd hidden cigarettes in the hem of the coat, and a couple of threaded needles, and three sugar cubes wrapped in paper (worth more than their weight in gold in terms of bribing the insatiable Anna). Hope, hope, soaring like a kite! We were clinging to anything we could. A coat without a lining, full of hidden pencil stubs! What treasure! It was already so *cold* in November.

We had a regular supply of calcium for Róża by then, too. She screamed and carried on the first time we tried to inject her, until Irina threatened to tie her down and gag her like the SS did when they operated on her in the Bunker. Who do you think Róża finally let give her the jabs? NO ONE. She did it herself. She'd rather do it *herself* than let anyone else poke a needle into her.

Thorny little Różyczka.

THANKSGIVING (by Rose Justice)

From the steaming kitchen it's a quarter mile
across the crowded wasteland to the patchwork barrack,
and we two get to haul the drum of soup
heavier than we are. The challenge is
not to let go. It's a race against time (it will be cold,
already it's cooled down), a race against
the several thousand grasping hands and gulping mouths
we have to pass before we eat.

(Thank you for the gold November sky,
the warm steel kissing my cold hands, no mud today.)

But first we have to get it down the steps.
We stop to rest outside the kitchen door—
the barrel still is gently hot between us,
steaming like a bath. One second's pause

to take a breath, gather the strength to lift
and then to drag ourselves and the drum of soup
the endless quarter mile over the cinders.

One second too long on the steps.
Behind us blows and screams (we are too slow),
and in the square a hundred hungry scarecrows
race toward us ready to lighten our load.
Trapped between buzzards and gaping beaks
we fight like the mutts we are—I *won't* let go—
I'll fight with teeth and feet, I'll bite the girl
who tries to scoop a bowlful under my clinging fist—
but when we kick it's our mistake.
The careful balance goes. The whole thing tips.

(Thank you for the hands that caught the heavy drum
and those who saved what spilled in bowls of soup
and cups of dirt and their cupped palms,
and those who sponged it up with bread
and those who licked the thirsty earth—
Thank you for the chagrin that let us go
with no one begging more, thank you
that now our load was lighter for the long walk back.)

April 28, 1945

Paris

Guess what—I am dressed.

I have been sitting here writing or pacing around this room stark naked for over a week, and now Fernande has taken me quietly in hand. It started with the extra quilt and now she has moved on to clothing. She brought me a pile of panties and camisoles and a couple of skirts and blouses. She's built a lot like me, tall and bony. Not as bony as I am now, of course, but she's built like I ought to be. I don't think the clothes are hers, though—I think they are her daughter's. She wouldn't say they were, but she did tell me her daughter had been put in prison and she doesn't know what happened to her. I am probably wearing another dead woman's clothes. But it is easier to wear these than the clothes Elodie organized for us because these have been lovingly looked after in the hope that their owner might come back for them someday.

And maybe Fernande's daughter will come back. But I doubt it.

This is what's so heartbreaking: the fact that I am here, alive, has no doubt given Fernande some grain of hope for her daughter. But the fact that I was *there* makes me sure there isn't any.

My hair is not too bad now—softer, the curl coming back. It's very short. I have been taking ridiculous long baths and stuffing myself with French cream—I eat it in spoonfuls, like soup, separately from the coffee. It is wonderful just on its own, mixed up with a little sugar (I mix margarine and sugar and eat that, too). Fat mixed with sugar is the richest thing I have eaten since forever and I just *crave* it. My hair likes it, too.

And I have been able to sleep a little longer each night. I don't jerk awake at four a.m. expecting the Screamer anymore. But I still have the dream about the cold wind in the empty bunks. Funny how my Ravensbrück nightmare is about the bunks being empty, because by the end they were *never* empty. The whole Camp was so overcrowded we had to sleep in shifts,

even during the day.

I have got to keep writing. I can't talk about it at all, not to Mother or Aunt Edie over the telephone, not to Fernande in broken French. It would break her heart, I think, if I told her about it. I keep wishing I could talk to Nick, but how could I explain any of it to Nick? How could I *possibly* make Nick understand?

I wrote him a poem for a Christmas present, though of course I knew I couldn't give it to him then. I still feel the way I do in the poem. Apart from the clean clothes, I am still a walking ghost. I don't know how I can possibly explain to him what's happened to me. *There won't be anything to say.*

LOVE SONG & SELF-PORTRAIT (by Rose Justice)

At first I dreamed that you
offered warm arms of comfort and strength,
pulling me close,
your soft lips brushing and kissing my bare head,
all of you loving me,
the nightmare over and the dream come true—
Now I only dream that you
offer me bread.

My dreams still produce you
out of habit, but the sweet
longing for your touch is gone.
I long for nothing from you anymore
but something to eat.

And if I did come back,
what in return could I offer to you,
who used to make so free
with my softness and kisses and verse
as if it were your due?
Imagine me

on your doorstep—would you laugh in the old way
and greet me lovingly:
Hello, it's been a long time,
how are you today?

I would offer you myself
in mismatched shoes and blood-soaked rags,
shaved scalp all scabs
and face gone gray,
no old woman but a walking ghost
on a skeleton's frame—
And you would be forced to look away.

There won't be anything to say.

If it was a clear night during a roll call, we'd get a whispered astronomy lesson from one of the imprisoned university professors. The astronomy lessons drove me crazy because they were in Polish.

"What did she say?" I whispered, getting frustrated, because I really *loved* learning the names of the stars—except for languages, astronomy was the one class we could do *practically*, and I couldn't understand the Polish astronomy teacher.

Karolina whispered, "She said it is December, and we won't see Arcturus in the evening until spring. When we see Arcturus again, the war will be over!"

I gasped. "It's *December*! My gosh—I'm nineteen! I forgot my birthday!"

"Forgot your birthday!" Róża snickered with scorn. "You've missed your name day, too. Yours is the same as mine, Rose, September Fourth, and I *never* forget. We have a party *every year*, and my sixteenth, last year, was so special. Zosia and Genca were on firewood-gathering duty in the pine forest, and they made me a flower wreath. And Gitte brought me a *cake*. A cake, honestly, a centimeter thick and as big around as the palm of my hand, with jam and margarine—they stole it from the

infirmary—I'd just been operated on for the fifth time and I was too sick to eat the cake, but I wore the wreath." Róza knew perfectly well how utterly pathetic this sounded and poked me slyly. "Tell us about *your* sixteenth. Did you have a cake with roses made out of pink frosting?"

"I *did*!" I exclaimed in astonishment. "How did you guess?"

"Your name is Rose."

Irina shook with silent laughter.

"Was there champagne?" Lisette asked.

"No, Mother wouldn't let us. We had Shirley Temple cocktails—ginger ale and grenadine. And Daddy hired a dance band. The party was in the hangar at Justice Field, and we spent the whole day before it moving planes out onto the field to get the hangar ready, and then we decorated it with dozens of colored paper lanterns shaped like owls—"

Crushing, black embarrassment kicked me in the head at this point and I clammed up.

"It's not a crime you weren't in prison on your sixteenth birthday, darling," Lisette said gently.

Róza let out one of her insane giggles. "Have you *ever* committed a crime, Rosie?"

"Shut up, 7705!" Karolina hissed. "I don't want to hear about her criminal activities. I want to hear about her pink cake and Shirley Temple cocktails."

I know why I forgot my birthday. It was sometime while I was in the Bunker. I had entirely forgotten who I was by the end of that two weeks. I lost count long before nineteen.

The Camp authorities shot our *Blockova*, Gitte, next. We didn't see that coming, but we should have, shouldn't we? Since they didn't shoot the Rabbits? We should have known we weren't going to get away with our desperate war of passive defiance. But we thought they'd take it out on us, not on Gitte. Although, of course, murdering Gitte and replacing her with the demon *Blockova*, Nadine Lutz, *was* taking it out on us.

After Nadine arrived there was no talking while we ate, no talking while the knitters worked, no talking in the bunks—we

were allowed to talk outside on Sunday afternoons only. Most of our communication happened while we were going to the toilet because Nadine wouldn't come near the waste ditches when everyone else was going. But she'd dole out soup herself for the sheer pleasure of smacking you on the head with the empty ladle afterward. She brought reinforcement guards with their dogs inside the barrack, even at night. It didn't stop us from trying to whisper, but it made every word we said to each other weighted with terror. One night she set a couple of dogs loose in the *bunks*. Gosh, we hated those dogs. The most common injury people turned up with in the sick bay, according to Anna, was dog bites.

I can't describe how *desperate* we were to fly below the demon Nadine's radar—to fool her, to go behind her back. We did *crazy* things. We'd be standing in a never-ending roll call and I'd inch one foot out of the mismatched shoe that was a little too big, so slowly you couldn't see me moving, and then I'd nudge Róza in the rib cage and she'd turn her head and glance down at my toes and stifle a giggle. You could still see the nail polish, disappearing into a thin ruby crescent as my toenails grew out, like the waning moon. Róza would poke Karolina in *her* ribs and hiss, "Candy store's open." And Karolina would poke Irina, and we'd all stand there poking each other and snorting with stifled mirth until Lisette exclaimed, "*Shhh!*" as Nadine looked in our direction, and I'd ram my foot back into the muddy shoe and stare vacantly at the back of the woman in front of me.

PLAYING STATUES (by Rose Justice)

If I sigh my shoulders rise and fall.
It counts as movement. I won't sigh. I'll blink.
I'll count how many blinks it takes before
the shadow of the smokestack hits the wall.
But if I blink I'll fall asleep. I've closed my eyes before
standing in line; it's dangerous to blink.
I'll watch the sky.
I'll count how many crows

touch the long cloud behind the trees.

Oh, God, but then I'll cry.

Wings in the pine boughs always make me think
of freedom. I won't count or blink or sigh.

I'll think of food. I'll think of bread and meat,
pretend that when we're told to go
there will be pepper pot
thick with tripe chunks, spicy and faintly sweet,
like Mrs. Kessler sells on Union Street.

God no, and no, and no! Of all things, not
Union Street: Don't think of *Union Street*!
Don't think of *home*.

Anything else but that. I'll throw
myself on the electric wire. I'll wiggle my toes.
I'll sprint to the end of the row
and sock that pretty dog handler in the nose.

That makes me smile and clench my fist.

I'm out. She sees me move. Now I
can blink and sigh and sob.
She'll make me count the blows.

My work team of Tall Girls got sent back to the maintenance
shed we'd cleared out earlier.

Since we'd been there some prisoners from the men's camp
had boarded up the windows and the big garage doors of the
shed and replaced them with just a normal-sized set of wooden
doors. Now we had to paint the interior walls black as high as
we could reach. Once the guards made us understand what they
wanted, they locked us in—Anna was allowed to make herself a
little camp outside the new door of the building, with a crate
for a chair and a coffee can or something for a stove with a fire

in it like a hobo. Where she got the coal and how she got away with burning it right out there in the open, I will never know. But she was a red armband. She could get away with a lot.

And because we had Anna for a guard, we could get away with little acts of rebellion while she wasn't looking. Inside the shed, Irina scavenged in the corners—nails, scraps of thin copper wire like they used in Siemens, wood splinters. French Political Prisoner 51444, otherwise known as Micheline, got busy painting Allied defiance all over the walls in letters three feet tall: *VIVE LA FRANCE! VIVENT LES ALLIÉS! MORT AUX NAZIS!* and a token *GOD BLESS AMERICA!* Her friend 51350 followed behind frantically covering everything up so they wouldn't get caught.

"You'll get us into so much trouble!"

"You should have seen what I got up to when I worked in the post office," Micheline said. "We'd put big black censor stamps all over instructions being sent to German officers, or we'd steam open envelopes and swap letters around so they went to the wrong people, or steam off stamps so there was postage due—and anything that came from Paris with a German name on it we'd return to sender. Every now and then we'd send off a mailbag with a burning cigarette butt tied up inside it. My God, I miss the thrill of being a civil servant!"

We all laughed. Everything I know about passive resistance I learned from Micheline. She always appeared to be doing exactly as she was told, but everything she did took twice as long as it should have.

We sure did drag out that paint job as long as we could. It was wonderful to be able to talk to each other for a little while without having to whisper or worry that someone would hit us.

I also painted words on the walls. It was such a relief to be able to write down what I was thinking instead of having to memorize it. It is true that I had to obliterate everything I'd written, but I think it is much easier to write a poem when you can write it down. I couldn't have written "The Subtle Briar" without that paint job. I spent three days slapping black paint on the walls of a disused warehouse and refining the most complex and ambitious poem I've ever written.

When we'd caked the entire interior of the building in black about three-quarters of the way to the ceiling, they turned out all the lights and shut us in so we could paint over the places where cracks of light came in through the boarded windows and around the newly built front wall.

Try standing on a ladder in pitch darkness with a bucket of black paint and not get any on yourself or the girl who's on the ladder beneath you. When they let us out as it was getting dark, in time to eat, all of us were covered head to foot in black paint. I had paint *in my ears*. We stood blinking blindly in the harsh streetlights, but of course we didn't get any time to readjust to reality—just got shoved back into our fives and marched back to Camp.

"What the hell are they making you do?" Róza demanded.

Our shed-clearing-and-painting job was a fierce discussion topic whenever we were allowed, or able, to talk. Lined up along the ditches in the dark at four a.m., usually.

"They're repurposing a maintenance shed."

"By boarding up and blacking out the windows? Why does it have to be so *dark*? What are they going to put inside it?"

"Maybe it's a new quarantine block—someplace to process new prisoners," Lisette said.

"You know what it's for," Karolina accused quietly. "You know it. You won't say it, but you know it. They have all these prisoners evacuated from Auschwitz and nothing to feed them. They are building a gas chamber."

"They are building two," said Irina. "A new building is going up outside the north wall. The men's camp is building it."

Lisette insisted, "That is a laundry, my dear. Ravensbrück is a work camp, not a death camp—an ordinary camp!"

"They don't dare shoot us in handfuls," said Karolina. "They're going to kill us all at once."

THE SUBTLE BRIAR (by Rose Justice)

When you cut down the hybrid rose,
its blackened stump below the graft

spreads furtive fingers in the dirt.
It claws at life, weaving a raft
of suckering roots to pierce the earth.
The first thin shoot is fierce and green,
a pliant whip of furious briar
splitting the soil, gulping the light.
You hack it down. It skulks between
the flagstones of the garden path
to nurse a hungry spur in shade
against the porch. With iron spade
you dig and drag it from the gravel
and toss it living on the fire.

It claws up toward the light again
hidden from view, avoiding battle
beyond the fence. Unnoticed, then,
unloved, unfed, it clings and grows
in the wild hedge. The subtle briar
armors itself with desperate thorns
and stubborn leaves—and struggling higher,
unquenchable, it now adorns
itself with blossom, till the stalk
is crowned with beauty, papery white
fine petals thin as chips of chalk
or shaven bone, drinking the light.

When you cut down the hybrid rose
to cull and plough its tender bed,
trust there is life beneath your blade:
the suckering briar below the graft,
the wildflower stock of strength and thorn
whose subtle roots are never dead.

It took me a long time to write “The Subtle Briar,” but it was

translated into three languages in a day. Every time it got passed on I got another bread ration. Oh, God, we needed *something* to cling to. We were scared.

They shot half a dozen Red Army women from our block, and six more from the Lublin Transport, though not Rabbits. No one knew anything about it ahead of time. It was a week before Christmas, and I'm sure of the timing because Karolina wasn't there with us for roll call that day. Nadine had caught Karolina showing off a little paper tree with tiny pop-out birds that she'd made for Lisette for a Christmas present and had sent her to the Bunker for *Fünfundzwanzig*. We were standing in the early-morning roll call—before breakfast, hearts aching for Karolina—when they just pulled the girls right out of line and made them take their coats off and hand them over to someone. That's how we knew they wouldn't be coming back.

That one girl's face, looking back at us in defiance as they led her away, bleak and desperate, biting her lip. She went shivering to her death in the dark, in the flowered summer dress she'd been wearing when I got here. One of the other girls tried to take her hand, and the guards wouldn't let her—they had to walk alone to their execution. We stood in silence for another half an hour while they counted us, but all I could think of was when I'd hear the shots and I'd know they were dead.

No one would ever know what happened to them.

The distant claps of sound made me jump half out of my skin when they finally came.

Lisette gave a single, angry sob. But the executed Polish and Russian girls hadn't cried as they'd walked away, so I bit my lip like the one in the flowered dress, bit my lip until it was bruised and bleeding, and I didn't cry, either.

They booted Karolina back into Block 32 as soon as they'd finished with her. She was at work later that day, knitting socks until she was well enough to go back to her patrol.

Being lashed in the Bunker turned her into a spluttering wreck. We had to let her lie on the edge of the bunk so she could have her back to the narrow aisle. She clung to me like a monkey, and I held her hands so she wouldn't fall off. Her

mouth was so close to my ear that she could speak to me in almost less than a whisper. “Do you think the scars will be as bad as yours? I don’t want scars like yours! It’s not fair, it’s not *fair*. They ruined my leg and now they’ve destroyed my back! I want to go to the Venice Film Festival awards wearing a Chanel evening gown. I want to wear a red bathing suit and sunbathe on the beach at Lido....”

Róza didn’t tease her. Actually, I don’t think Róza could hear her. But even if she could, you didn’t make fun of someone who got *Fünfundzwanzig*.

“You had twice five and twenty,” Karolina whispered to me in wonder. “*Twice* in a week. I only had one round, and I can’t stand up and I can’t sit down, and I have to go back into the antiaircraft ditches tomorrow. How did you bear it when they beat you the second time?”

“I don’t know.” I really don’t. “I can’t remember.”

“I don’t want people to see the scars!”

“Who cares about the scars! I’ll wear a red bathing suit anyway. I don’t care who sees my scars! Not me—I can’t see them! I’ll wear a two-piece!”

“Your Nick will like you in a red two-piece,” Karolina whispered. “Tell me a Nick Story.”

The Nick Stories were evolving from fabulous rescue fantasies into rhapsodies about food that often had nothing to do with Nick—I couldn’t stop myself. But it was dreamily distracting to make them up.

This one was just for Karolina. I didn’t dare whisper loudly enough for the others to hear, but Karolina needed distracting. My lips barely moved against her ear.

“Okay. It’s just after supper and there was meat in the soup, chunks of sausage, so you’re feeling strong. You and me are carrying the empty barrel back to the kitchens. And there’s a full moon, everything is light, all silver, and the *Appelplatz* and the *Lagerstrasse* are empty—they haven’t started the evening roll call yet. And then you hear this clattering, old-fashioned airplane engine. It’s a German plane, with ugly long wheel struts like a stork—actually it is a Stork. Nick’s stolen a German Storch so the antiaircraft guns won’t shoot at him, because it’s a

German plane. And Nick lands right in the middle of the empty *Appelplatz*. You and I drop our empty soup pot and run, and Nick opens the door, and we jam ourselves into the backseat—you can sit on my lap. And he flies us back to—”

Here I stalled, brutal reality kicking in. Where would we go?

“—Lido,” Karolina whispered back. “Let’s go to the beach on the beautiful Adriatic Sea. Red bathing suits for both of us in the backseat.”

I wonder where Nick is now, what he’s doing. If he’s still alive. Oh, I hope so—I hope so.

OceanofPDF.com

April 30, 1945

Paris

I had a phone call today from Aunt Edie, but the line was very bad and she was in a hurry—I didn't ask about Nick. Edie is coming to get me this weekend. I am panicking about that now—having to see Aunt Edie and be polite. I can hardly bear to think of the shock on her face when she sees me. It's one thing to fool Mother on a transatlantic phone call, but I won't be able to fool Aunt Edie face-to-face.

I don't understand why I don't want to go home. How can it be possible for me to feel more desolate than I did on Christmas Day?

Christmas presents—poems and feathers and bracelets made of string or paper. Elodie sent me a minuscule tea set made out of tinfoil. I tore my rose hanky in half diagonally to make two little triangular ones, and gave Elodie the side with Aunt Rainy's pretty embroidery. Karolina made me the most wonderful tiny flipbook that played a two-second cartoon she'd drawn, of me in my Spitfire ramming the flying bomb. The bomb exploded into stars in the last frame.

There was a Christmas tree set up in the *Lagerstrasse*—with *lights*—cross my heart. They played German carols over the loudspeakers, "Oh Christmas Tree" and "Silent Night." And gave us jam and margarine with our bread. The SS guards got blotto, staggering drunk. In Block 32 we were allowed to sing carols, mostly in French and Polish and Russian, so I couldn't join in—but I told a ton of fantastic stories. Nick performed a series of daring rescues, and we all ended up skating on the Conewago Grove Lake, and then there was a rambling Hotel Hershey story involving sleds and a sumptuous Pennsylvania Dutch smorgasbord buffet.

I mostly gave everybody poems for Christmas, but I made another for Lisette, after our Christmas Day disaster. Actually, it was for thorny little Różyczka. But neither one of us ever told her about this one.

It had been my idea to do the Christmas bread, and

Karolina who did the artwork—we were so excited about surprising the others. We cut our entire ration into squares an inch wide, like Fliss did back in Hamble, and we decorated them with *stars*, a scraping of margarine and a tiny star-shaped blob of red jam on each square.

HOLIDAY GRACE (FOR LISETTE) (by Rose Justice)

“Now we’ll give thanks,” you said, “and bless this food.”

Smiling, you passed around the Christmas feast—
a loaf sliced small in diamond panes and spread
with stars of glittering jam, bright tinsel treats
to put us in a festive mood.

We took the pretty stars and you, devout and pleased,
wished us “*Joyeux Noel!*” and gratefully blessed the food.

Irony turned your frail adopted daughter
into a sneering brute.

“Bless *what?*” she snarled, wild with angry laughter.

“Why, are these holy wafers? Call this *food*?

Tasteless stale bread, a smear of sour fruit!

Call it Christ’s body and his blood!

The Host can double as our Christmas treat—
now we can take communion as we eat!”

The tinsel turned to dust. All of us looked away
in shock and shame, stunned not so much
by her coarse, bitter blasphemy as that she’d say
something so cruel to you on Christmas Day—
you, who so love us all without condition.

You told her quietly,

“Sit by yourself. Give thanks alone. We’ll wait
for you before we start.” No indication
of how she’d speared your childless, pious heart.

We didn't eat. She sulked for half an hour
on the dark boards alone. After another
of us began to cry she crept back to your side,
and you were full of love and joy, because you always are.
She whispered quietly, "I'm sorry, Mother."

—Though you are not her mother, only she
who once, some time ago and in a different hell,
covered her tearful face and sang to her
while others dragged her mother's body from your
overcrowded cell
so that she would not see.

Sandwiched in between Róza and Irina that night, I thought about Christmas in Pennsylvania. Not about past Christmases—I was thinking about *this* Christmas. I thought about *my* mother and Daddy and Karl and Kurt and Mawmaw and Grampa, and how they'd be sitting around the table for Christmas dinner—maybe they were doing it *now*, this very moment—sitting at the cherry table with Mother's Limoges china from out of the corner cupboard, and the poinsettia tablecloth and the brass-and-china candelabra with the tall red candles on it, and Daddy starting to carve the turkey. Mawmaw would be trying to say funny things to make the boys laugh, and Grampa would be starting on his third bourbon. Suddenly Mother would leap up from the table and run into the dark living room, lit only by the low fire and the red and blue and green lights on the Christmas tree, and she'd curl on the sofa and sob.

She'd be doing it *right now*. I could see it so clearly, as though I were looking in the living room window from the front porch.

She'd know I was missing—she'd have known that for months. And she hoped and hoped I was still alive, but she didn't really believe it.

And the worst thing was that even though I *was* alive, I would never be able to tell her—and even if I could tell her, if I could have come through the feathers of frost on the

windowpane and whispered in her ear, “Your Rosie is still alive,” what hope could I have given her when I told her where I was? That I was starving and freezing and covered with lice and scabies and would probably be dead of typhoid or shot for stealing a turnip before the war ended?

Well, anyway, I started to cry again.

After a while Róża wiped my face with her sleeve.

“You are thinking about Pennsylvania now, aren’t you?”

“I am thinking about my mother.”

“You idiot. I never think about my mother. I’d rather pinch the holes in my leg until they’re black and blue than think about my mother.”

I could understand that—it was probably less painful for *her* never to think about her mother. But it didn’t help *me*.

“My mother will *never know* what happened to me,” I said. “At least your name is out there on the BBC. Your legs are in those photographs. I’m just French Political Prisoner 51498. They don’t even have my nationality right. No one will *ever know*. And I bet they’ll incinerate all their precious prisoner records anyway, when the Allies come. They won’t want anyone to find out what’s going on here, just like they don’t want anyone to find out what happened at Auschwitz last summer.”

“Don’t think about your mother. Think about the food she’s eating,” Róża advised cheerfully. “You have a special meal on Christmas Day, like the Germans, right? What do you have for Christmas dinner in Pennsylvania?”

How she could be cheerful about food after what she did to Lisette I do not know. But we had the Christmas dinner discussion anyway. I won’t bother to write the rest of the conversation, because it was boring.

But now I am longing again for Cope’s Dried Corn, boiled for two hours in milk and butter and sugar and salt. I am daydreaming about a tablespoon heaped with golden milky corn—just one spoonful.

On New Year’s Day, they made us line up for a special roll call, and the stinking Commander gave a speech over the

loudspeakers.

It is one of the things I have nightmares about—that tinny voice droning on and on all around me, in words I can't make heads or tails of, on and on and on. In my dreams I don't understand the words, but at the same time I know exactly what the voice is saying.

That's because while we were standing there, in real life, Lisette was translating like sixty on one side of me and Karolina on the other, a sort of madwoman's stereo speaker setup. So I had to listen to it all twice, Karolina a little behind Lisette.

"He says, You'll never get out alive—"

"He'll never let us out alive."

"They won't let the Allies get near us—"

"He'll kill us all before the Allies get here."

"They'll dismantle the Camp—"

"He'll mine the Camp, rig it with bombs, blow up the whole thing with us in it—"

"—And one of the gas chambers is working now—"

"And the first selections for gassing will be tomorrow."

This was the same stinking Commander who liked to come and watch people get their backsides beaten raw every Friday. It could have been his idea of a joke: see if I can make all fifty thousand of them cry on New Year's Day. It was hard to know whether to take him seriously.

Róża didn't. I could see her shoulders shaking as she tried desperately not to laugh.

"Oh, God," she cackled. "He must have really hit the New Year with a bang last night!"

He might have been kidding about the mines. He wasn't kidding about the gas chambers, though.

They started with the old and the injured and the sick, and they'd just pick you out of roll call. They tricked people into *volunteering* for it by telling them they'd be taken to a "rest camp." It didn't take us long to figure out what was going on. The Lublin Special Transport reckoned they were doomed: most of them limping, all of them condemned to death more than three years ago.

When it rained, when hail rattled on the roof, when the wind howled, when a train came clattering by, when the planes roared overhead or the air raid sirens wailed, when the anti-aircraft guns thumped and the demon *Blockova*, Nadine Lutz, couldn't hear us, we all burst into a frenzy of whispered plots and panic.

Irina hadn't let Nadine stop her from scavenging. She carried the copper wire from the shed wrapped around her waist like a belt. It was thin and flexible and she'd get it out under the table or over the ditches, sometimes even working at it lying blindly in the dark bunks with her hands held up over her head. Then she'd twist what she'd built carefully around her waist again and get it out later. Eventually she had to hide it in the roof behind the ceiling panels.

"Are you making a bomb?" Róza whispered in an agony of delight and curiosity, as we all balanced ourselves outside in the dark over the stinking sewer. "Like they did at Auschwitz?"

"Kite!" Karolina guessed, more sensibly.

"It's a plane," I said.

I'd been watching Irina shape the wings, the long and narrow wings of a glider. I could see where she was planning to reinforce the fuselage with her stolen strips of wood. It would be too heavy for a kite. But it might glide like a model plane, if she got a chance to cover it with her stolen paper. In the right wind it might soar for miles.

Róza choked back one of her insane giggles. "That's not going to be big enough for all the Rabbits."

"Big enough for all your names, though. Another escape for the Rabbits' names!"

"You have to write in piss so it's invisible," Róza said knowingly. "That's how we got the letter to the Pope."

It was getting harder and harder for the guards to keep track of what we did—we couldn't get out of the camp, but the whole place was so crowded and filthy that it was easier to hide sabotage and thievery, if you weren't too sick to move.

"It will need a hell of a wind," Irina said. "If we could be ready to launch—find a place to hide it—"

"I can launch it!" Karolina said. "I can launch it from the

air raid ditches. I can hide it in the sandbags till we get the right wind. You can sneak it out to us in one of your Corpse Crew carts!”

“Corpse Crew”—more and more, that’s what they were using my team for. During the winter, as everyone started collapsing with cold and starvation and a million diseases, that’s *all* we did—they stopped giving us other jobs and we were just one of a dozen Corpse Crews. They gave up on us boarding up broken windows and concentrated on clearing the bunks in the *Revier* and the other sick bay blocks (they kept adding extra ones, trying to keep the typhoid and tuberculosis cases separated from everyone else). There were always dead bodies piled outside the tent in the morning, and there were usually a few from our own block, with so many new people coming in—the incinerator in the crematorium was always working, greasy black soot splattering the daylight sky and red cinders spattering the sky at night.

I carried so many dead women this winter that I am—I don’t know how to put this. I want to say it’s like typhoid—I have been inoculated. I am immune. After the first couple of weeks, it stopped being appalling and became ordinary. It was better than if I’d been put to work in the crematorium. Wasn’t it?

It was better. I didn’t do anything I’m ashamed of. Some of it was too fearsomely gruesome to write about, even to think about anymore, and my mind skips lightly over it, the same way I can’t remember the week between my beatings. There was that time we had to pick up one of the *schmootzichs* and it turned out she wasn’t dead—this pathetic bundle of bones and rags lying in the *Lagerstrasse*, still breathing. The guard who’d found her made us load her up anyway, but we managed to sneak her into the washroom in the *Revier* on our way out to the crematorium. She was dead when we got back.

I made the place a little cleaner, a little less of a hellhole. Not much less, but what can one living girl do when there are two dozen dead women she has to move in a day? What can one starving girl on her feet do to help out a couple of hundred

others who can't get up? Especially if you don't want to catch typhoid yourself.

I kept telling myself: *I've been inoculated. I've had the "jabs."*

I am sure that Anna's stolen vitamin C tablets helped, too, but even so I was the *only* one of my work team who didn't get sick this winter. None of us ever got admitted to the *Revier* ourselves. We lived in horror of it, partly because of what we saw there several times a week—for me it was also because I knew in much too much detail what had happened to the Rabbits there. For a while, Micheline had a fever high enough that she could have begged off work and got herself into the sick bay—you had to have a fever of 102 before they'd let you in—but instead she hid for three days in one of the blocked-up toilet cubicles in her barrack. None of the guards *ever* went in the broken toilets. Micheline was such a genius at pretending to follow rules that the whole time she was sick she didn't miss a single roll call.

We never launched Irina's glider. We did get it hidden in the sandbags, but we never got the right wind or a moment when we wouldn't be spotted trying to hurl a model airplane an open-arm-span wide over the twenty-foot-high walls. Who knows what happened to it, whether anyone found it, whether the names scribbled all over the fuselage were still legible? But dreaming about the potential success of our airmail service, doing it all in secret, kept us *alive*.

Hope is treacherous, but how can you live without it? When you lost hope, you turned into a *schmootzich*, nothing more than a starved mouth and snatching hands that even the guards ignored except when they were counting everybody—or you *died*.

KITE-FLYING (by Rose Justice)

Hope has no feathers.
Hope takes flight
Tethered with twine
like a tattered kite,
slave to the wind's

capricious drift,
eager to soar
but needing lift.

Hope waits stubbornly,
watching the sky
for turmoil, feeding on
things that fly:
crows, ashes, newspapers,
dry leaves in flight
all suggest wind
that could lift a kite.

Hope sails and plunges,
firmly caught
at the end of her string—
fallen slack, pulling taut,
ragged and featherless.
Hope never flies
but doggedly watches
for windy skies.

Lisette had bigger plans than paper airplanes.

“There are transports leaving every day for Ravensbrück’s satellite camps,” she directed. “We need to get the Rabbits out of here. We need to be *organized*. We’ll start with the youngest—all the Rabbits under twenty-one, the schoolgirls. Smuggle one or two at a time into the evacuation transports as they leave. Now listen, my darlings, the next time they try to pull any more Rabbits out of a roll call, we’re going to have to be brave. We’re going to have to disrupt things so violently they can’t count us. *Everyone* switch numbers—something like that. And every one of the girls who gets out will take the list with her—the names from the Lublin Transport, everybody who was operated on. We are going to *tell the world*.”

Lisette got dragged out of line the next morning without

warning, and we thought she was dead. I marched off to my hideous work sniveling like a two-year-old. I sobbed quietly to myself all day—Micheline worked beside me and Irina without asking what was going on. It wasn't the first time one of us had sobbed quietly to herself all day. But Anna got so fed up with me that she smacked me with someone's empty shoe.

And it turned out Lisette wasn't dead anyway. Because she was an archivist she'd been handpicked to do some secretarial work in the record office. She came back unbelievably excited. She whispered her news to us in the evening roll call.

"There's a radio in the record office—a radio! It's always on! We've pushed the German army back!"

"Really?" Karolina gasped. "*Really?*"

"Well, back to where they were in December—everyone is fighting up to their hips in snow."

We groaned. It was the end of January, and the best we could do was beat the Germans back to their December starting point?

"What about France?" Róža and Karolina clamored together. "What about Belgium? Have the Allies crossed the Rhine yet?"

"No, no. Look, darlings, forget about the Western Allies! The Soviets are going to get here first. *Yesterday they liberated Auschwitz!*"

It was all I could do not to yell. We stamped our feet wildly in the black slush, a little defiant dance of triumph.

"Shit," Irina said. "I will go straight from a Fascist prison camp to a Soviet one."

"Why? You're a double ace! A decorated Hero of the Soviet Union! You spent four months being interrogated by the enemy and didn't tell them anything!"

"When a person spends four months being interrogated by the enemy and is still alive at the end, the Soviet Union calls her a traitor, not a hero. No, thank you. I would rather hang myself than go home."

She sounded like she meant it, too, which kind of put a damper on our excitement about being rescued by the Soviets.

Anna caught me in the horrible converted washroom and handed me a list of numbers written on a strip of gray paper a quarter of an inch wide.

“What is this?”

“Tomorrow’s list.”

“Tomorrow’s *death* list? But—”

There were dozens and dozens of numbers there. I started to read them and realized that I knew almost every one of them. I associated *faces* with most of them. 7705 especially—Róża. Karolina, too. Every single one of the Rabbits was on that list, and a few others, including Lisette.

“They’re going to shoot *eighty people* in a day?” I gasped.

“Just tell everyone you see. That’s what I’m going to do. Maybe...”

I was reeling. Except Irina, my whole family was on that list.

“They can’t execute *all* of them!” I burst out, and the German girl laughed at me.

“Of course they can. They can do whatever they fucking want. And what they’re doing now is burning the evidence.”

She pointed to the last number on the list—32131—a lot higher in sequence than the others. Also a familiar number.

“*You, too!*”

“I’m a witness,” she said with bitter irony. “My God. I never thought I’d end up shoveled into the Ravensbrück incinerator with that pathetic bunch of Poles.” She suddenly took the unlit cigarette butt out of her mouth and tucked it down the front of her dress. She looked away. “I’m sorry.”

“Tell me how to tell people in German!” I gasped. “Tell me how to say, ‘*They’re killing the Rabbits.*’ If I tell people in German, everyone will pass it on!”

She wasn’t even listening.

“They’ll gas us,” she said, gripping the sides of the dry sink and staring at the stained tiles. “That many at once—they won’t waste the ammunition. They’ll do it all at once, now that they’ve got that gas chamber operational. It *hurts*. If you stand by the wall near the crematorium you can hear them screaming.

Ach—”

She swore in German and let out a sob.

“Listen, Anna,” I said fiercely. “It won’t happen! Okay? No one in this whole Camp will let it happen. Last time they tried to execute any of the Rabbits, we hid them. They killed our block leader because she wouldn’t give them up. But that was just us, fighting back on our own. You’ve got to tell *everybody* this time.”

She looked up at me with wild, wet eyes and gave a croak of a laugh. “You really believe we can do something, don’t you, kid?”

“*We can try!*”

Anna stared at the wall, avoiding looking at any of the bodies piled at our feet. Two more of my team came in, carrying another. I hadn’t started undressing any of them yet.

“Anna’s on the list!” I cried, holding it up.

Anna, gray-faced, added indifferently, “So are all the *Kaninchen*.”

“*Les Lapins!*” the French girls exploded in outrage. “The Rabbits? The *KRÓLIKI*? All of them? *No. Never!*”

“Hide them!” Micheline exclaimed. “Hide every one of them tonight! All of Ravensbrück will fight for the Rabbits. People are *waiting* for a chance to fight for the Rabbits.”

“Karolina?” Irina asked me. “Róża?”

“*All of them*. The whole Lublin Transport. Lisette, too.”

Unlike me, Irina didn’t panic.

“Let me have your armband,” she said to Anna. “And one hour. I can do something.”

“Where will you go?” Anna asked sharply.

“To talk to my friend in the power plant—we were electricians in the Moscow Metro together, before I flew. I think she can switch off the lights. She will do it in roll call tomorrow morning. They will find no one.”

Anna moved slowly and cautiously, like a person with a migraine. She peeled off her red *Kolonka* armband and held it out to Irina. Irina slid it over her own sleeve and stalked out, her shock of white hair catching the gleam of the bare electric

bulb overhead as she turned to go.

“You’d better hide, too, Anna,” I said in English.

“Who’ll hide me?” she scoffed with bleak fatalism, her pale eyes bright and wild. “You could break my leg, maybe, make me look like a Rabbit. See if the disguise fools anyone.”

We all looked at her in pity and looked away. I sure couldn’t invite her to hide with my Block 32 Camp Family—and even for twenty loaves of bread the Auschwitz evacuees in the tent wouldn’t hide a German criminal. I thought about offering to swap coats with her, to swap our numbers. I really did. It is the Girl Scout in me, always wanting to help. She was an okay group leader, and now she just seemed so grim and crazed—so *afraid*. But I couldn’t come up with a good reason to sacrifice my *life* for her.

Micheline saw me thinking about it. She shook her head at me to stop me from opening my mouth.

“No one will notice another body here tomorrow morning,” Micheline suggested to Anna brutally. “No one counts the corpses more than once. If we get the chaos the Soviet electricians promise, hide in here.”

FOR ANNA (by Rose Justice)

Your sullen sneer,
thin lips and
unlit cigarette
have disappeared
without a trace
and no one cares
and we’ll forget.
I don’t care, either,
but I saw
desperate and raw
fear in your face—
you said you’d hide.
I wonder now

how hard you tried—
and if you lived
or if you died,
I wonder how.

Block 32 that night was a prison all on its own, swarming with guards and dogs, the wire gate locked, the door to the barracks barred. It was almost surprising they let the rest of us back in, but they did, and we got our soup ration as usual. We even fought over it sort of as usual:

“Here, take mine, you need all the energy you can get tonight.”

Or more realistically, “Look, just give me yours, ’cause you won’t need it if they kill you tomorrow morning anyway.”

Karolina had the same fierce, dazed gleam of insanity in her eyes as our German *Kolonka* Anna—the look of crazed disbelief at the UNFAIRNESS of it.

Lisette just looked like Lisette. Róża was a pain in the neck.

“What do you think I’ll look like when I go up in smoke from the crematorium chimney, Rosie? As sexy as Karolina, slinking across the sky?”

“*Will you shut up!*”

She wasn’t trying to be funny. She was trying to be brave, Różyczka-wise. But it was making Karolina cry.

Irina took hold of my hand and pressed it against her waist. Tied inside her dress was a pair of wire cutters. The hard line of her mouth was set in the ghost of a grin. She spread her palm and rocked her hand at me. Still a combat pilot.

The thing was, so many people were sobbing and crying and praying that night that neither the guards nor Nadine could hear us as the Rabbits made their escape. I crawled with Róża and Karolina over the infested bare boards that counted as our bunks—people moved out of our way. *Everybody* helped. When one of the guards shouted or the dogs started growling, we lay flat and sobbed loud and genuine sobs of fear and frustration. It was easy.

Irina and a couple of the other Russians got out first, and

they did the dirty and dangerous work of cutting a hole in the wire that fenced off Block 32 from the rest of the Camp. Then we spent most of the night hoisting all the Lublin Special Transport girls out a couple of the broken windows. I had an easy job—I had to keep stuffing wads of newspaper over the jagged glass around the edges of the window frame.

The tricky part was crossing the yard between the barrack and the fence without being seen, and getting through the fence. I didn't have to do it myself, but it still makes me shiver to think about it. Nobody got caught, but, my gosh, we worked *slowly*—though after the first dozen Rabbits had made it through the fence, we got good at it.

It took two of us on one side of the window and two on the other to lift one person out efficiently. Then, one by one in the dark, Irina and her Red Army friends escorted all the Lublin Transport Rabbits through the fence into the main Camp. After that they were on their own—on crutches or limping or clinging to each other.

Irina caught Róža herself when it was her turn.

"The tent is the nearest place to hide," Irina whispered.

"*I'm not going back there,*" Karolina fired down at her, next in line to sneak out.

But Róža couldn't walk—not really, not in the dark—and Karolina was stuck with her.

"If we don't come back, Rose knows all our names," Róža said in ringing tones of menace, a little too loud.

"*Shut up,* you stupid little girl!" Karolina gasped hysterically. "Or they'll kill Rose, too, and there will be NO ONE who gets out of here alive to tell anyone!"

"The whole Camp knows. Everybody knows. Rose will tell the world." Róža growled orders at me. "You are to tell the world, Rose, you hear me?"

"I will! I promise!"

Irina took her under her arm to help her scuttle, limping, toward the hole in the fence.

Sometime before the four a.m. Screamer, Irina and I crept back to our own bunk in the pitch black, and that hellhole was

so darn overcrowded that when we got to our spots, there were new prisoners sleeping soundly in place of Lisette and Karolina and Róza—I don't know who they were.

We lined up for roll call at four thirty a.m. in what felt like a crowd of strangers, Irina and I at sea without our Camp Family. The whole Lublin Transport was missing.

"Think they'll kill us instead?" Irina whispered.

"Maybe." I gulped, thinking of Anna's relentless description of poison gas, and my impossible promise to make sure that everybody knew everything when it was all over.

Irina tilted her hand at me. "*Taran*. We go down fighting."

They read the list of numbers in German. It was like listening to a swarm of droning hornets.

"*Siebentausendsiebenhundertzwei, Siebentausendsiebenhundertdrei, Siebentausendsiebenhundertvier...*"

I looked down at the cinders, scuffling my feet nervously, trying to keep warm. A small black pool of slush and dirt formed beneath me.

Siebentausendsiebenhundertfünf. That was Róza, 7705. They called Karolina's number, and Lisette's. I glanced at Irina, but she was staring straight ahead.

The messenger doing the announcement was an SS woman, in one of their grim black rain capes over her uniform. She came to the end of her long list of numbers and paused. Then she barked an order in German. She paced from one end of our first row to the other, her cape flapping shadows in the dark as she peered at the numbers on people's sleeves. It was pretty quiet, except for the usual coughing and sniffing. The turkey-buzzard messenger yelled at us again. No one moved. She hadn't called *our* numbers.

She barked an order at the guards. They'd sent extras, expecting a fight. She took hold of a dog's leash and started prowling among the first rows of silent, stubborn language professors and music teachers and widowed mothers and orphaned daughters, and projectionists and spies and bartenders and cleaning ladies and Resistance agents and Red Army

soldiers and Girl Scout saboteurs. And *taran* pilots.

And, in our first real moment of glory, the lights went out.

I think, if there could be anything I am glad I was there for, it is that moment.

We let out a ragged roar of sheer excitement, all fifty or sixty thousand of us at once. I swear, it was all of us at once, and this time they couldn't control *anything*. We had nowhere to go, of course—we still couldn't get out—we were all too starved to overpower anyone, and we couldn't see who we were fighting anyway, but BY GOD *we weren't going to let them count us*. They weren't going to count *anybody* that morning.

"Line up for work! Work details!" we all shouted ridiculously—like we were trying to get organized, when in fact we were hurling handfuls of gravel.

I felt the flat of Irina's hand against my shoulder. She rocked her palm. *Taran*. She did it against my shoulder because we couldn't see each other in the dark.

Maybe it wasn't really fighting back—maybe it was just pathetic passive resistance. The lights go out and everybody runs around in the dark, throwing dirt and screaming. But it *felt* like we were fighting back. There's only so much fighting you can do in one day on a slice of bread made mostly of bonemeal and two bowls of lukewarm turnip broth.

I *wish* I would stop sidetracking onto food. Even now, when I am not hungry, I can't stop thinking about what it was like to be starving.

It is true, though—we got tired. Some of the women actually just went back to bed, climbing back through the broken windows of the block to snatch another hour of sleep. That also made it hard to count us! By the time it was light, we were so disorganized that they gave up on the roll call—they also halfheartedly tried to stop Block 32 from getting our morning "coffee" (there I go again), but a group of Polish prisoners from another block came running over with a couple of the big saucepans from the kitchen and passed us a desperate breakfast through the chain-link fence.

And there weren't even any Rabbits in there with us at that point. That's how determined everyone was.

The lights went out again at the evening roll call. Irina and I stood pressed close to each other, our shoulders touching, standing still amid the chaos.

"How many times will she get away with it?" I whispered. I was worried about Irina's friend from the Moscow Metro, the Russian technician responsible for the lights going out. Irina didn't answer; I hadn't really expected an answer anyway.

The lights went out at every roll call for a week.

"Rose! Rose Justice! *Rosie!*"

Through the never-ending background of coughs and groans and creaking bunk slats I heard my name, low and tuneful, coaxing me in my sleep. The demon Nadine, asleep on her mat by the small stove in the knitters' workroom, would never have been able to hear it. I sat bolt upright and banged my head against the ceiling. Irina grabbed me by the arm to steady me, instantly awake like a soldier.

"Outside the window," Irina said.

We climbed down to the level below us and crawled over people to the broken window. There was a sort of human-shaped bundle of rags standing there in the black slush, tapping for attention on the window frame with a stick while simultaneously trying to hang on to the side of the building and avoid the filth that was smeared all over the wooden wall from the ground to about three feet up—that was where we all went to the bathroom now.

"It's one of those *schmootzichs* begging to get in," I whispered. "Oh, God, they're so creepy. How do they get away with wandering around the Camp like this? How did she figure out how to get through the Block 32 fence? Nadine will kill us if we let a *schmootzich* into the bunks."

I do not like to admit how much the *schmootzichs* scared me. Ever since that first day, when they swarmed over me with their starved claws, I had been scared of them. I was scared of them touching me and I was scared of becoming one of them.

“Rosie, that is not like you! She would sleep *under* the bunks if we let her in,” Irina suggested. “The *schmootzichs* do not care about the mess.”

“*You fucking morons!*” the *schmootzich* hissed. “I’m Róža!”

The stick she’d been tapping on the window frame was her crutch. Irina climbed out the window and hoisted Róža up to me, and I hauled her in, using my coat to pad the frame this time (we all slept in our coats by then, and they let us because there were so few blankets left).

“What are you *doing* here, Róža? You’ve got to hide!” We scolded her in several languages.

“I don’t care,” Róža snarled. “I’m sick of hiding.”

“But Block 32 is the first place they’ll look for you! Are you hungry?” They’d cut Block 32’s food back by ten loaves and a barrel of soup to try to coerce us into turning over the Rabbits. A bunch of us kept trying to save bread to sneak out to the people hiding, but it was just impossible with the rations down—people would snatch it out of your *mouth* if you weren’t fast enough.

Róža shook with bottled laughter at my question and hissed, “Do you think we get five-course meals in the tent? Of course I’m hungry. You’re hungry, Irina’s hungry, everybody’s hungry. We’re all fucking starving. I didn’t leave because I’m hungry! I’m *bored*. You thought I was a *schmootzich*! That’s a fabulous disguise. I can go around pretending to be a Camp beggar. I can carry messages!”

“You can’t WALK.”

“I’ll ride in your wheelbarrow.”

She’d ripped off her Ravensbrück sleeve patches. She’d managed to get some dead woman’s number inked on her wrist like an Auschwitz prisoner’s tattoo. Carefully darned woolen hose from Elodie covered up her maimed legs. And in fact Róža *could* walk without her crutch, but it was this impossible crablike, lurching, gimpy series of dives and landings—she wouldn’t put weight on the leg that was missing pieces of bone, because one of the girls who’d had the same operation had snapped her tibia in half trying to walk on it and died of the infection that came raging in afterward. And without Anna, our

calcium supply had dried up.

“What messages will you take?” Irina said. “Translation for the dead?”

“I’ve got a message for *you*, smart aleck. Lisette and Karolina are coming out tomorrow, in broad daylight, because they’re not going to hide anymore, either. They’re going to be our delegation to the Commander.”

“Are they *crazy*?” I whispered back.

“No, we’ve done it before. We really did! We took a petition to the Commander before this one, saying we refused to be operated on again. He didn’t pay any attention, but this one is such a weasel he always pretends to be polite—he makes a show of negotiating with us so he’ll look good to the Red Cross. And yesterday Lisette got six of us out! There were three trucks transferring people to other camps, and she got six other Rabbits to sneak on board—we cut all their numbers apart so that only the symmetrical ones were left, and then we mixed them up and sewed them on upside down and backward. They’ll get more of us out today—they take hundreds of people to the satellite camps every day because there’s no damn room here. Lisette wanted me to go, too, but Karolina wouldn’t let me because of my legs—it has to be people who can walk without looking like they’re dancing.” She giggled. “Karolina wants me to go, but she wants to go with me—I need taking care of, right?”

“Like fun!”

But of course, little Różyczka *did* need taking care of. She couldn’t go without help. I lay awake with my emotions whirling like the beaters on an electric mixer, feeling stupidly envious of Karolina’s bravery, elated that we’d got people out, fearful that they might have climbed into the wrong truck—the transfer trucks were usually closed in and the gas chamber trucks were usually open-topped, but you never, never really knew.

“Elodie,” Micheline uttered under her breath to me as we got dragged off to work as usual.

“Elodie?”

She clamped her lips together, because a caped turkey buzzard with a dog was keeping an eye on us.

They'd closed the Camp streets and put guards and roadblocks at all the intersections as they tried to catch the women who were hiding. By now, the second week of February, there were nearly twice as many women in the Camp as when I got there. Hundreds of people came in and hundreds of others got taken away again every day. We had extra roll calls so they could try to count us—daylight roll calls, six in a day once. In my head every single one of them takes place in a snowstorm, but that wasn't true, because I can also remember watching planes going over against a sky as blue as a summer day at the Lake, and I remember just *longing* to be up there with my hand lightly on the control column, just *longing* to be back in my other, half-remembered existence.

Every day, me and Irina and our Corpse Crew of a dozen tall French girls still had to go around making our collection with carts and wheelbarrows up and down the *Lagerstrasse*. It still had to be done—it couldn't go more than a couple of days without being done. We had a new *Kolonka* who didn't speak English and didn't like to come too close to us—she did a lot of screaming at us, but as long as we did our job she didn't smack us. We never saw Anna again. I didn't have any idea if she'd managed to save her own skin. I still don't know.

And now Micheline was mumbling Elodie's name without telling me anything else, and I was frantic with worry.

"Elodie gives," Micheline muttered as we loaded the dead into the incinerator-bound trucks waiting by the main gate. We weren't allowed outside the gate anymore—prisoners from the men's camp had to do the unloading on the other side.

That's all she said. *Elodie gives*. Then Micheline went white-faced and tight-lipped *again* as we got herded aside and slapped and kicked until we took our clothes off. The guards weren't supposed to let us through the various blockades unless they searched the carts first. But that was such a repugnant job that a lot of the time they'd just search us instead—make us strip and stand quivering with cold and embarrassment, stark naked with our arms at our sides, while they paced around us looking suspicious. The less cooperative we were the longer they made

us stand there. So we got in the habit of being almost unbelievably meek and mild when we were working, and this included hardly daring to breathe a word to each other.

And really, sometimes you didn't feel like talking. That day the guards didn't even bother to tell us we could get dressed again—they just walked off to pester someone else and left us standing there at attention in our stunningly unattractive birthday suits until after a quarter of an hour Irina got mad and risked dragging her clothes back on without getting anyone's permission.

"Clothes," Micheline muttered as we pulled our ragged dresses over our heads.

I sighed. "Clothes," I agreed.

Later, as we carried a body together through a narrow aisle between befouled bunks, she grunted, "For the Rabbits." She gave me a *look* as we lowered the poor thing onto the pile, like she wanted me to answer her somehow.

I frowned at her, not daring to say anything. Micheline held my eyes with hers—she had gorgeous eyes, a clear yellow-brown hazel with dark brown flecks.

I thought back over the handful of words she'd sprinkled me with that day, like a puzzle or a radio serial, and came up with:

Elodie gives clothes for the Rabbits.

"Yes," I hissed. "*Oui.*" Just to let her know I understood.

This is what she meant: the women who sorted the clothes taken from the new prisoners were organizing civilian outfits for all the remaining Rabbits. Civilian clothes were the first thing you needed if you were going to escape. Not that anyone *really* escaped—there was that Gypsy girl they caught in the woods, and her own block beat her to death because they'd had three days' *Strafstehen* while the guards hunted for her. Everyone knew about her. But it didn't stop you from thinking about escaping.

Just getting people out of Ravensbrück, even on a truck bound for another camp, counted. Hundreds of the newest prisoners were transferred in or out without being put in quarantine or even getting issued with prison clothes, and

civilian clothes would help the Rabbits blend in with them. We had the clothes now, and my team was good at organizing false numbers from the bodies we picked up. Even if the Rabbits couldn't get out, they could hide in the other blocks, replacing the dead.

Lisette and Karolina had diplomatic immunity—that's the right term. They were the only contact the Camp officials had with the Rabbits. That incredibly slippery character, the Camp Commander, *wanted* to negotiate with them. This is the same stinker who on New Year's Day told us over the loudspeakers that he was going to blow us all up. Here's what he tried to get the Rabbits to do for him now:

"Please sign a form saying you hurt your leg in an industrial accident."

"Please, when the Soviets get here and turn this place inside out, could you tell them how well you've all been treated, since it was the previous Camp administration who authorized the first operations and the current administration who kept you alive?"

"Please, all of you come forward and we will send you together to another, more comfortable camp."

That was the best one. We knew the camp they named had already been shut down, so...did he really think people were all going to climb meekly into a lot of empty trucks specially designated for the doomed Lublin Transport and let them drive everybody out the gates toward—where? Around and around the outside walls of Ravensbrück till they got back to the gas chamber? As if we had *no idea* what happened to the people they loaded into trucks and drove around the walls every day? You could *hear* them going around. You could *hear* them stopping at the warehouse we had to paint black on the inside. You could hear the sobbing and yelling when they made people get out of the trucks on the other side of the wall. And then their worn and lice-ridden clothes would come back inside, and Elodie had to sort them.

We knew what would happen when they loaded two hundred of us into open trucks before breakfast.

"The Commander's a stinking weasel," Karolina said. "He's scared and he's desperate. The Nazis are beaten and they know it, but they *just won't stop*. It's like—it's like Róża when she's angry at something—she just gets nastier and nastier, even though she *knows* everyone will end up crying. The Commander wants signed statements from us all, so he can prove to General Eisenhower how generous and humanitarian he is when the Americans get here, but when he's got his signed statements, *then* he can safely kill us and pretend it was an administrative error."

"The Rabbits are safe, my dear," Lisette vowed, "because no one will sign anything. We will agree to nothing."

"No one is safe. You and I could be sentenced to execution *anytime*—they're only letting us come and go because we're still wearing our numbers and can be counted. The others are only safe till someone finds them," Karolina retorted grimly.

Kaninchen Króliki Lapins Králíci

Králíci is Czech. I don't know how to write *rabbits* in Russian, but it sounds the same as in Polish. By the end of February, everybody in the Camp knew all the words for *rabbits* in every language of every nationality at Ravensbrück, because the Rabbit Hunt was the one thing that united us.

The Rabbits sometimes called themselves something else. They used the word *król*. I would not have figured this out except that Karolina made a lot of caricature portraits for people showing them as rabbits wearing little crowns, and Lisette explained it to me, because she knew I love the subtleties of words as much as she does. *Król* is a rare Polish word for "rabbit." But also it means "king."

There is a rare English word for "rabbit," *coney*, which also sounds a little like the German word for king—*könig*. It's also like the Dutch word for "rabbit," *konijn*. I'd turn all this into a poem if only I could find a connection that wasn't a coincidence, or if it worked better in English. *The Kings of Ravensbrück*.

Because in a crazy way, they ruled the place.

I want so desperately to remember it. Hiding the Rabbits

gave us back our lives. But so many of the things we did to save them were *unspeakable*, and I don't think I can write about it. Róza hitching rides with me and Irina as we worked—as though we were hauling turnips? Filling in the missing people at roll call with bodies stolen from the *Revier*, so that our numbers always came out right when they counted us, no matter who wasn't there? Only in Block 32. I said before that we were really good at propping people up.

It's not unreal to me yet, though it might get that way soon. It still feels very real. And not even horrible—the dead are just the dead. I am convinced that the living people they once were would have been proud of their protective bodies hoodwinking their murderers to save someone else.

But it's not *civilized*. There is something indecent about it—really foully indecent. The civilized Rose-person in me, who still seems to exist beneath the layers of filth, *knows* this. And I can't write about it.

I did make up a poem about it, “Service of the Dead,” but I just can't write it down.

I think it is the most terrible thing that was done to me—that I have become so indifferent about the dead. I would be able to do a human anatomy course without ever feeling faint, do surgery with steady hands, clean up *anything* and not be sick and never mind the blood.

Maybe I could be a doctor.

A real one—go to medical school—

Maybe I could! I could be a poet *and* a doctor—like William Carlos Williams! A new direction—a new *world*—I could help *fix* things now. How does his poem go, “Spring and All”—

THEY ENTER THE NEW WORLD NAKED,
COLD, UNCERTAIN OF ALL
SAVE THAT THEY ENTER. ALL ABOUT THEM
THE COLD, FAMILIAR WIND—

A poet *and* a doctor. Maybe I could.

This is the first I have thought of it. *Maybe I could.*

May 3, 1945

Paris

There were five dozen people from the Lublin Special Transport in hiding. That's a lot of people to hide. Worse than that, it's a lot of people to feed when there isn't any food.

We had to keep moving people around, and sometimes they spotted us doing it. They'd corner people, and we were just so desperate we'd do *anything* to get away—a couple of girls picked up another prisoner and *threw* her at the guards who were after them. Standoffs with dogs. Climbing in and out of broken windows, hiding in the bunks in the tuberculosis block with dying women so horribly contagious that the guards wouldn't come in. Irina's wire cutters got passed around because you never knew who'd need a weapon. Most of the girls weren't strong enough to do anything with them anyway, but it made you feel brave just to carry a pair of stolen wire cutters. They always came back.

They saved a dozen lives when Irina and Róža and I got caught by SS guards with guns, cornered against the fence around the *Revier*.

It was a Sunday. On Sunday, theoretically, you were allowed to walk up and down the *Lagerstrasse* for a couple of hours chatting with a friend and drying your underpants, if you had any—you could wash them under a spigot, but you couldn't hang them anywhere or someone would steal them, so you just paced up and down holding them out in front of you and flapping them around. That Sunday we weren't drying underwear. We were shifting a bunch of Rabbits from one hiding place to another. You weren't supposed to walk with more than one or two other people on a Sunday afternoon, and we'd followed that rule. But we were more or less together just because the street was so crowded, and the guards were on the lookout for people who limped. That day there were too many Rabbits together in the same place.

It happened fast. They rounded us up and backed us against the fence. I think it was partly our own fault, because we were

so used to being herded that it took us a moment to realize the guards had spotted our Rabbits, and weren't just trying to clear a path for some high-ranking official or a transport truck.

"A selection!" Irina guessed, and a couple of people heard her and started to cry, because now we all thought we were going to be gassed.

"Shut up! Stand up straight!" Róza barked at the other Rabbits in German, like an SS turkey buzzard herself. Selections weren't usually random—they went for the older women, or the sick ones, or people who looked sick. Having a face full of cold sores or impetigo put you at high risk for being gassed. So you stood up straight and tried to look healthy during selections. Or pinched each other's cheeks to make them glow, like we used to do in the bathroom before a school dance, when we were too young to wear makeup.

In the back of our huddle, Irina struggled to hack a hole in the fence around the *Revier* behind us. The rest of us tried to hide what she was doing. The guards surrounding us weren't the usual SS women—these were men, armed soldiers. For a moment we stood facing each other like opposing dodgeball teams.

I wonder what we looked like. Fifteen filthy, haggard, ragged, wild-eyed girls—half of us crippled—facing off against two dozen tall, strong, well-fed boys with rifles. *What did it look like* as the troop leader slowly raised his gun? I wish I had a picture of us all. I wish there was a picture of it on the front page of the *New York Times*. No one will ever believe me.

Except—the picture wouldn't tell you the whole story, would it? It wouldn't show you how Irina was frantically trying to cut us an escape route in the fence behind us, or tell you that the front row of us was defensive—me and the three brave Red Army girls from Block 32 who liked to pretend they were heavies had all moved to stand in front of Róza and the other Rabbits. The man who'd raised his gun swept the barrel up and down our pathetic front line, looking for an easy gap.

Róza screamed in Polish at the top of her voice, "*Bread! Bread! The SS are giving out bread!*"

A mob swarmed over us, first right off the street, and then

a horde of starving women came piling toward us from the tent.

“BREAD! BREAD HERE!” we all screamed, because nobody cared if there *was* any or not—just the *idea* of bread was enough to cause glorious chaos. Irina and I and the Russian girls pushed Róza and everybody on their stomachs through a plate-sized hole between the fence and the ground, and they hid in the *Revier*. The rest of us were safe in the crowd.

Safe. What a completely loony use of the word *safe*. Exactly the way I have been using *hope*.

We pried up the filthy red clay tiles in the Block 32 washroom and dug a pit under the floor of the barrack, stinking of sewage and cold as the Arctic, and lined the hole with straw and a couple of the last rotting cotton blankets, and we hid Róza and five of the worst-damaged girls there for a week.

The SS didn’t kill any Rabbits. It didn’t stop them from gassing two hundred other prisoners every day. You always think you’re immortal, don’t you? I mean, it hasn’t happened yet. *I am still alive.*

When they read off my number over the loudspeakers, I didn’t even hear it. I was so busy listening out for Róza’s number, or Karolina’s, it never occurred to me to listen for mine. But of course I was still wearing it, and I was still being counted every morning and night as Available Prisoner 51498. They called out lists of doomed prisoner numbers all the time. Not everyone could hide. One of the French girls in our block had escaped a selection only because her mother had swapped numbers with her and been gassed in her place.

It was still dark and no one had had breakfast yet. Karolina grabbed me around the waist.

“Einundfünfzigtausendvierhundertachtundneunzig,” she hissed in my ear. 51498.

Then I heard her, but I still didn’t take it in for a moment or two. And then my heart turned into a block of ice.

“What? Why?”

You face it with a total lack of comprehension, even though less than two weeks ago when we got caught in front of the

Revier fence I'd thought they were going to shoot me.

"It is your transport," Lisette gasped. "The French girls you came with. All of them."

I stood frozen and staring, completely unable to believe it or react. A deer in headlights.

Irina peeled away Karolina's arm and took me by the wrist. She stepped out of line with me, and led me quietly out of our row and through the gate toward the *Lagerstrasse*. No one else from our block had been called, so there wasn't anyone to go with me to the trucks, and they let Irina lead me out.

I went with her meekly.

We walked hand in hand past the tent. But instead of heading toward the gates where they parked the terrible open trucks, Irina guided me to double back around the far side of the tent. When we got close to the fence around Block 32, she put a hand on my shoulder and gently pushed me to the ground, and got down beside me, and we crawled back into the parade ground around our block through the hole in the fence. People saw us, but no guards did. No one said anything as Irina and I climbed in the back window of our barrack, the one we'd used as an escape route when we first hid the Rabbits.

Inside the barrack, Irina made me take off my damp coat and sit on the floor close to the cranky little stove that was supposed to heat the whole place. There wasn't a fire in it now, but it was still warm to touch because the demon Nadine slept next to it and sometimes managed to stoke it up with scraps of coal or wood before she went to sleep. Irina got me a drink of water. Neither of us said anything; she just stood there, waiting patiently while I drank the water, and then finally she reached down to help me back to my feet.

"Come, Rosie," she insisted. "Hide with Różyczka."

I shook my head because I didn't see the point—I wasn't a Rabbit.

But I was too numb to rebel or take control of myself. So I let Irina lead me into the washroom, to the place under the sinks where the boards and filthy matting covered up our six hidden Rabbits in the pit under the floor. Irina pulled up a board and made me crawl in with them.

Invisible hands pulled me down beside the others. Irina laid the false floor back in place above us, and the six girls already hiding there found an impossible space for me alongside them—like playing sardines. For the first ten minutes, I couldn't do anything but retch. I thought I'd suffocate.

"Worse than being gassed," came Róza's infuriatingly cheerful whisper. "Is that who I think it is?"

When I figured out how to breathe, I started to cry.

Someone hissed angrily, "*Shut up, you idiot!*" because I was making too much noise. And wasting air.

"What are you doing here, 51498?" Róza whispered in my ear.

"They are gassing *my whole transport*," I sobbed.

"Bad luck. There isn't anything special about your transport!"

I wanted to kill her.

"Micheline is special. Elodie is special," I hissed through clenched teeth. "Kiss your wool hose good-bye, you miserable Rabbit."

We curled against each other in the dank, stinking underground in silence after that, trying to breathe and not kick anybody and waiting to be found and shot. I knew I had to stop crying, and the only way to do it was to recite poetry to myself, moving my lips without speaking, clinging to words, to sense and beauty—

"Silver bark of beech, and sallow
Bark of yellow birch and yellow
Twig of willow."

Róza knew what I was doing, even in the silent dark. I felt her familiar thin arms wind around my waist and hold me tight.

I don't know how she held out there for a week—I don't know how any of them did. I think I was there for two days. You could hear the Screamer, muffled, telling us when the roll calls

and meals and work details came. That was the only way to count the time passing. We ate stolen bread—no soup—and nothing hot, ever—we had to eat lying down.

“Tell us something warm and sunny. Tell us a Lake Story,” Róza whispered.

“We are all wearing red bathing suits. But all different, with flowers on yours and stripes on mine. Big white polka dots on Karolina’s, like Minnie Mouse, and Irina’s is silver with red stars, like a Soviet aircraft. You are all staying in our summer cottage with me, and we are going to lie on the beach in the sun and drink Coca-Colas, in frosty green bottles right out of the icebox—one by one, boys will come and ask us to go for a canoe ride with them. And when we are each in a different canoe with a different boy, we will line up at the rental dock and have a race across the Lake.”

“Lisette, too.”

“Gosh, yes, Lisette, too. There is a very handsome famous actor from the Summer Rep Theater at the Chautauqua Playhouse who’s come to the Lake for the afternoon, and he spots Lisette right away. So we race the canoes, and your team will win. And we’ll all be annoyed, so we’ll gang up on you and tip your canoe. Then everybody will tip each other’s canoes and we’ll all fall in the water, and it’ll feel wonderful because we’ll be hot and sweaty from racing, and while we’re splashing around there will be belted kingfishers scooting overhead and scolding each other—”

The only thing that makes this a fairy story is the idea that we could ever all be there together.

The Nick Stories were all these ridiculous rescue dramas, Hollywood hero antics that could never happen in a million years. But the Lake Stories—I didn’t even bother to pretend the staff at the refreshment stand would bring us our drinks in a Lake Story. We’d help ourselves and pay, just the way anyone would. Even the boys asking us for a canoe race really happened last summer—I mean the summer before last, 1943, on that wonderful weekend before Labor Day when I’d nearly finished at the boring old paper box factory and I spent the day at the Lake with Polly and Fran.

And that is what makes it *so unfair*. It is such a *simple* fairy story.

Lisette dragged me and Róža out of the pit during breakfast on the third morning and helped us change into clothes I knew had been organized by Elodie—plain, respectable stuff—navy skirt and stockings, and incredibly good coats, with wool cuffs and collars and lining still attached, though the elbows were threadbare. Numbers stolen from dead women were attached to the right sleeves, and there was no evidence of yellow star patches on the fronts. Warsaw coats, not Auschwitz coats. Lisette's hands were cold and her face was drained and grim. I knew something terrible had happened, something that had changed her world.

“What's wrong?”

“Irina came back to that roll call wearing your coat,” Lisette said. “And Karolina fought her for it.”

“They fought over my *coat*?” I repeated dumbly, astonished. They wouldn't do that, either one of them.

Róža understood instantly. “They didn't fight over your coat, you turnip head,” she said coldly. “They fought over your *number*.”

Lisette looked away from me, her cold hands still helping me into the warmest clothes I'd worn for months and months.

“Did Irina win?” I whispered.

“Karolina won.”

I feel like it is the worst thing I have ever done—lie weeping in a hole in the ground while Karolina—

I can't write it.

Karolina on the beach at the Lake in a red bathing suit, sunbathing under a blue sky.

“Now pay attention, my dear,” Lisette said, holding me fiercely by the shoulders. “You are going with Róža.” I know that's why Karolina did it—for Róža, not for me. Everyone Róža's age was already gone, but she was so crippled she couldn't go by herself.

Karolina and Lisette were counting on me to get her out, to get her scrawny, mutilated legs out where someone might see them—because Róža was a better piece of evidence than Karolina, who could walk to her death without limping.

“You have *one task only* this morning, and that is to keep anyone from noticing Róža’s legs. Hide her, hold her up—if she falls over, make it look like you have knocked her down. Irina is going to be on the same transport, so look for her and she will help you. There can be one of you on each side of Róža when you get to the other end, but you will be on your own until you find Irina.”

“Where’s Irina?” we asked together.

“She’s in the Punishment Block—”

“Because...?” Róža interrupted, and then guessed, “For fighting with another prisoner during roll call, right? For trying to steal another prisoner’s coat?”

Lisette pressed her thin lips together, and I caught the crazed wet gleam in her eyes that had been there when I’d first met her, right after Zosia and Genca had been shot. Not for the first time, I wanted to punch Róža in the teeth.

“For trying to steal another prisoner’s coat,” Lisette agreed. “They are shipping out the whole Punishment Block this morning; I don’t know why, but you are going with them.”

“In *these* clothes?”

“There will be some Warsaw evacuees as well; they’re still wearing civilian clothes. You know where the transport trucks line up? You’ll have to wait till they bring Irina’s block out and then get into line with them. Oh, darling *Różyczka*—”

“Rose will take care of me,” Róža said with composure. Because I couldn’t say it myself. I wasn’t sure.

“What if they take you straight to—”

“What if they take us straight to Monte Carlo? We’ll be rich!” Róža laughed hilariously.

Lisette kissed Róža on both cheeks. She gave me six slices of bread, wealth beyond imagining—two slices each, two days’ worth, to last us who knew how long. And who knew where she got it. Then she kissed me, too.

“*Get her out,*” Lisette said. She didn’t say good-bye to us. But of course she hadn’t said good-bye to any of her other children. And this time she had a slender hope we weren’t going to be killed.

And this time she was right, as it happens, though she never knew, and may be dead. I can’t believe Lisette is dead, but she probably is, and I’ll never know that, either.

It was about six weeks ago—I have been in Paris for just over two weeks, writing and writing, and we left Ravensbrück late in March. It hadn’t stopped snowing when we left—at that point I thought it was *never* going to stop snowing.

Irina was easy to find because she is so tall, and because of her white hair. She looked as dazed and crazed as Lisette, standing in line, waiting to climb into the transport truck. She was staring at nothing. We couldn’t get near her, but we got into the same truck.

You know, I think we could have climbed into any truck we wanted to. Who’d have ever dreamed that any prisoner would *willingly* climb into one of those stinking, overcrowded hell-bound crates? Who’d have dreamed that *I* would?

It was bomb fuses all over again—like taking the fuse away from the boy on the railway tracks, or refusing to make the relay. *I didn’t have a choice.* I really didn’t. I *had* to climb into that truck with Róża. For Karolina—for Lisette. For Micheline and Elodie. For *Izabela, Aniela, Alicia, Eugenia*—

Controlled flight into terrain.

We were expecting something like a three-day trip with maybe a bucket of water to share among us, nothing to use for a toilet, and having to sleep standing up because there wasn’t any room to sit down. We were expecting that, prepared for it. Resigned to it, anyway. But the journey didn’t take much more than an hour. And we knew we’d really been driving somewhere, not going in the slow and terrible final circle around the outside of the Camp.

They didn’t let us out right away. The hours crawled by. When they finally opened the trucks, for the first few minutes, while everybody was untangling themselves from one another

and gulping in fresh air, there were only two things I thought about: hiding Róža's legs, and getting to Irina. I dragged Róža under one arm and shoved my way toward Irina's white head. Irina caught Róža under her other arm, and then I'd done both my jobs.

"Where is this place?" Irina asked pointlessly. Who had any idea? It was a rhetorical question and I looked around rhetorically—

And I knew where we were. *I knew where we were.*

We were in the exact same parking lot I'd pulled up in on the back of the mechanic's motorcycle when Karl Womelsdorff and I flew to Neubrandenburg last September. It could have been anywhere, the loading area for any factory complex. There wasn't really anything distinctive about it. But it is emblazoned on my brain and I recognized it.

"We're in Neubrandenburg," I said. "It's one of the Ravensbrück satellite camps. They make aircraft parts here—there's an airfield. And a town."

Róža acted *so fast*. "Give me the bread," she demanded in a whisper, and I stupidly gave it to her.

"*BREAD!*" she screamed, just the way she'd done in front of the fence by the Revier. "*Das Brot! Chleb! Le pain! The SS are giving out bread!*"

There was another instant riot. Only this time there really was bread.

She threw it with calculated cunning and accuracy into the middle of the crowd of hundreds of starving women climbing out of the trucks. They didn't mob us—they mobbed the bread. All the available guards piled in after them to sort out the havoc. There were big chain-link fences topped with barbed wire around the yard, but the vehicle gates were still open wide.

Róža ran. Or didn't run, exactly, just hurled herself in her ridiculous lopsided gimpy lurch away from the crowd and around the truck we'd just climbed out of. Irina and I sprinted after her, but she was in the open before we were, and before we could catch up she was out of the gates and into the road.

That was our escape. It took thirty seconds and six slices of

bread.

We didn't know it then, though. We were just in a frenzy of panic and fury that Róza could have done anything so utterly, desperately, monstrously *stupid*. We were out of Ravensbrück, out of the danger of being gassed, we'd got her scrawny Exhibit A legs safely into an ordinary work camp, and now she'd killed us all by trying to escape.

But they hadn't counted us getting into the truck back in Ravensbrück. Well, maybe they'd counted Irina, but they hadn't counted Róza and me, and they didn't count us getting out. So that was lucky—they didn't know we were there, and thanks to Róza's staged food fight, no one noticed us leaving. We caught up with Róza easily as soon as we broke free of the bread ruckus. The road outside the gates was also full of trucks. In a couple more seconds, the dogs would come after us, we'd be dragged back into the factory yard, and they'd beat us all to a pulp and shoot us. We didn't turn back. How could we turn back? They'd have beaten us to a pulp and shot us if we'd turned ourselves in.

Irina threw Róza under the nearest truck and dived in after her. So did I.

For another minute or two we lay there panting. Running fifty feet had just about killed us. We were still so close to the fence that we could *see* the riot in the parking lot.

"Come on—" Irina gasped, and we crawled beneath the trucks, moving slowly from one to another, until we were a little farther away and we felt safe enough to rest again.

We were also lucky the ground was frozen. We didn't get coated head to foot in mud or slush. I shrugged off my coat and gave it to Irina. She pushed it away and I threw it back at her insistently, too fearful to talk. I wasn't being noble—I was being sneaky.

"*Put on the coat*, you stupid bat girl," Róza snarled. "You look like a *schmootzich*. We don't have a hope in hell out here with you in stripes. Cover up! As soon as we stand up we have to look like normal people—"

I'd caught what was usually Róza's disease: inappropriate hysterical laughter. I lay on my face on a sheet of oily ice under

a German munitions truck, smothering myself and shaking with mirth.

“Holy Mother of God!” Róza swore. “I’m surrounded by lunatics!” She began to giggle, too. Irina did not, but she quietly put my coat on and then lay next to me with her arm over my back.

“You threw away *all our bread*,” I pointed out to Róza. “Talk about lunatics!”

And we both broke into muffled hysterics again.

Irina took hold of my ear and twisted it hard. I shut up.

“We have no papers,” she said. “We speak no German. What is our story when someone stops us?”

Róza improvised wildly, “We are French—”

“*French!*”

“French servants. We have to be French—it’s our only common language. You and Rose are *cooks*! And I am your sister. Only I speak German. We are servants for a German officer—I do all his sewing and cleaning—”

“I bet you do,” Irina snickered.

We lay quietly for a few minutes, feeling falsely secure. It was cold, but no colder than standing in a roll call in the dark.

“We better move,” said Róza. “If they notice the bat girl’s gone, they’ll look for her.”

We crawled for half an hour. We crawled underneath the entire row of trucks. When there weren’t anymore, we had to stand up and walk, vulnerable and obvious, along a barren stretch of road outside the camp and factory complex. We could see the town in the distance, church spire and silhouettes of buildings, and there wasn’t the faintest question that we could go that way.

“Maybe we should try to get into the woods,” I said. A lot of the landscape around us was the same sandy tracts of pine and birch that surrounded Ravensbrück.

“We’d just freeze to death. We should go into town and walk down the middle of the street,” Róza countered. “Right down the middle, like we belong there. Slowly.” She turned and gave me a witchy grin. “Smiling at everyone.”

“Gee whiz, not smiling like *that*.”

“You look almost human in that skirt and sweater, Rosie,” she said critically. “Like an SS secretary, almost human. The kerchief is the best part.”

“Shut up, Rabbit.” The kerchief was ridiculous. But I was more ridiculous without it. I’d had my head shaved again very recently, as punishment for annoying the demon Nadine with nervous humming.

“Dark in a few hours,” Irina said to me.

“We can’t stop here. But—I know! There were farms on the other side of the airfield—I saw them as we were landing. This is the road they brought me in on. We’ll go back past the airfield. Maybe hide in a barn—find some turnips or potatoes —”

“A cow!” Róza improved wildly.

“Maybe a cow! Maybe send you into someone’s kitchen to organize a loaf of bread. Maybe—” Now I was thinking about what I’d find in the summer kitchen of the Mennonite farm just on the other side of Justice Field—succotash and applesauce and smoked sausage and shoofly pie. Talking like this was just going to lead to fantasies about *fasnachts* and bologna. “Anyway, we’ll be safer on the other side of the airfield. Come on, girls!”

And we walked down that road in broad daylight, Róza lurching between us tucked beneath our arms. There was no one else walking there, and we were careful to cower in the weed-filled ditch at the road’s edge, gritting our teeth among last year’s dead stinging nettles, whenever traffic passed. We kept chattering to one another, insulting one another, discussing the weather—*anything*, like walking through a den of lazy lions and praying they won’t get up. If they raise their heads and keep an eye on you as you pass, that’s a little disconcerting. But as long as they don’t come after you, you’re safe. You know you better not run. Well, we couldn’t run. We had to stop and rest about every quarter of a mile. It was probably a four-mile walk to the airfield.

“How is Lisette?” Irina asked.

“Brave,” I said.

Róza asked conversationally, “What is the officer’s name?”

“Which officer?”

“The one we all work for. In case someone asks.”

“Oberleutnant Karl Womelsdorff,” I answered.

“Wow, that was fast! Oberleutnant Karl Womelsdorff! I thought you didn’t speak any German, French Political Prisoner *Einundfünfzigtausendvierhundertachtundneunzig*. You must have a devious streak after all.”

OceanofPDF.com

May 4, 1945
Still at the Ritz

Except that I feel like I have never lived anywhere else but this big room and its gorgeous bathroom, this could have happened yesterday. I think it is partly the reason I haven't even ventured out to find a dining room. The *terror* of that first day in the open, with the treacherous future yawning in front of us like the Grand Canyon—on foot with no food and no money and no papers in the middle of Germany, eternally at war, probably with people hunting for us—although I'm pretty sure now that if they had been, they'd have already found us for sure. But you don't think everything through logically when you have no real future except to plummet over the edge of the Grand Canyon.

We didn't make it past the airfield. I guess it is a miracle we made it that far. The ground crew who caught us were very kind. They were all airmen and mechanics, not SS guards. Maybe this isn't fair of me, but I actually think they were *smarter* than the SS guards—I mean, they were doing skilled jobs, not siccing dogs on starving women. Seems like that must automatically make you a nicer kind of person. Not necessarily, I guess, but it's a good start.

These guys knew perfectly well what we were and where we'd come from. Irina was still in her prison uniform beneath the threadbare coat; Róža couldn't walk; I had no hair beneath my bandanna. And only Róža spoke any German.

We got stopped along the barbed-wire fence by the airfield perimeter. There wasn't anyplace to hide. It was an unarmed man on a bicycle who caught us—he pulled up alongside Irina and laid a hand on her arm. I saw her assess him, recognize that she couldn't take him on, and her shoulders sagged. She didn't try to shake him off. I didn't run. Róža couldn't, and Irina was caught. There was nowhere to go anyway.

Róža tried to feed him a line. I don't know what she said, but I swear I have never seen her be so charming. When was the last time she sweet-talked anyone—maybe the Gestapo officer who made her watch while they beat her mother to a pulp?

Anyway, she was like Snow White persuading the huntsman not to kill her—heart-melting. As well as being the only one of us who could speak German, Róza was the only one of us who was actually dressed inconspicuously, since I'd given my coat to Irina. Lisette had combed and braided Róza's hair and twisted it up before we left. If you could look past Róza being filthy and skeletal and crawling with bugs, she was lovely, really, in a waiflike Orphan Annie kind of way.

I remember worrying about how close we were standing to the wire fence, thinking it was probably electrified.

The mechanic on the bicycle didn't threaten us. He got off his bike so he could walk alongside us, and escorted us back to the main gate and onto the airfield. Over Róza's head, Irina shot me an agonized glance. I spread my hand into a plane and rocked the wings at her. Irina's mouth cracked into a small, sad ironic grin, and she briefly rocked her own hand back at me.

All right, they are really going to shoot me this time, I thought. And I have completely *failed* to get Róza out safely. *Idiot!* What was she THINKING? But at least if they kill me with Irina, as a prisoner on a Luftwaffe airfield, I will have died as a combat pilot. My father was a combat pilot and so is Irina and so am I. We are soldiers and *I am not going to make a fool of myself.*

At the big vehicle gate, the guard in the sentry box made a telephone call, and after a minute, a couple of other people came out to meet us. One of them took my arm the way the mechanic had Irina's. They still let us support Róza between us.

They frog-marched us to a bleak, cold maintenance room in the hangar. One side of the room was crowded with a million paint cans and tubs of dope for lacquering fabric aircraft wings, and the rest of the room was stacked with empty buckets and brooms and mops. They took the brooms and mops away in case we might try to use them as weapons, then locked us in and went away. The mechanic whom Róza had been charming earlier left her a small canvas bag, like a gas mask bag, that turned out to contain two margarine sandwiches and a thermos of watery beef broth.

We fell on this unexpected feast like turkey buzzards. My gosh, food—or lack of it—makes you stupid. We couldn't do a

thing until we finished eating, and it never occurred to us to save any of it.

Afterward, Róza stood staring out the window across the acres of Luftwaffe concrete and wire that surrounded us again. After a moment she said matter-of-factly, “We’re fucked.”

Irina and I glanced at each other. Irina nodded once in grim agreement.

“I’m sorry,” Róza said.

We went and stood next to her at the window. Róza licked a smear of leftover margarine from the back of her hand and repeated sadly, “We’ve had it. I really thought we might win. I’m sorry.”

I thought so, too. I think we all did.

We stood quietly, staring across the airfield with her.

Standing on the apron, only about thirty yards away and gathering a crown of snow like icing sugar, stood a familiar ungainly Luftwaffe plane with a black iron cross painted on its side and a black swastika painted on its tail.

“That is a Storch,” Irina murmured.

“A stork!” Róza translated, and let out one of her mirthless giggles. “A sign of spring, right? Of new life! Good luck in the coming year! We had one nesting on our chimney the year I was arrested.”

“It’s a German liaison aircraft,” I said. “Um, for communications. And they use it for ambulance work.”

“Pffff.” Róza gave a dismissive snort and turned away.

“Controls for two pilots? Room for three?” Irina asked quietly.

We were both forming the same desperate, insane idea.

We knew Róza was right. We knew we’d had it. We were locked inside a building inside an electrified perimeter fence with dogs patrolling it—a more comfortable prison than the one we’d just come from, but nearly as secure, and in maybe less than an hour they’d send someone to collect us. And if they didn’t shoot us on the spot, they’d haul us back where we’d come from like they did with the Gypsy girl who tried to escape, and after they were done with the dogs and the beating,

we'd probably be too dead to execute.

So Irina and I had a quiet little discussion about the plane, without speaking our crazy idea out loud, because we didn't want to get Róża excited. She'd already decided we didn't stand a chance and was dealing with it in her own way. She wasn't listening to us anymore; she was making her own last desperate statement. She'd begun ransacking the shelves and paint tins and was leaving behind her a good-sized trail of destruction.

"Flight controls front and back," I told Irina. "But you can only control the flaps and throttle from the front seat."

She gave me a funny look. "Have you *flown* a Stork?"

"I've flown *that* Stork," I whispered.

Her white eyebrows soared into her hairline. She grinned. "Rosie, you are full of surprises."

"That's the plane I came in on. But of course I haven't flown for six months."

"Who gives a damn?"

I shrugged. I didn't think I could do it—I didn't think I was *strong* enough to do it, but I didn't like to say so. We'd no other chance. Irina hadn't flown for two years.

"I haven't flown in the dark. Or in snow, much."

"Controls for two—I can help you. You have flown this plane, and I have flown at night in snow. We can do it together. If we go down burning, we will take another Fascist aircraft with us, yes, Rose Justice? *Taran!*"

"*Taran!*"

We didn't need to say another word. We both began to assess the window. There was iron mesh pressed between the glass, not prison bars but like chicken wire, and even if we smashed the glass we'd still have to cut the wire somehow—Irina's wire cutters had not gone with her to the Punishment Block. The main window was just a sheet of plate glass like a shop window, but there was a narrow transom at the top that slotted open with a lever to let in air.

"Little Różyczka will fit," Irina said.

"And then?"

Irina shrugged. "She can take the hinges off the door."

“Break it down,” I improved.

It was just as likely. Róža’s starved hands would never be strong enough to unscrew the steel door that shut us in, even if she had the right tools.

“Give her a hammer and she will break the lock—”

“She’ll find a blowtorch!”

We laughed together mirthlessly and turned away from the window to look at our pet Rabbit.

This is what Róža was doing: she’d found an open bucket of black paint, and she was covering the walls with graffiti, just like me and my doomed French work team had done last November. Róža hadn’t wasted any time. In letters six inches high, she was writing out the list of the Rabbits’ names, as high as she could reach, all seventy-four of them, dead and alive. She was covering the walls with names in black paint beneath a thick black heading in German that said something complicated and accusing like, “Polish women used illegally as medical specimens in the Ravensbrück women’s concentration camp at Fürstenberg”—a great big shout of defiant witness that they’d have to scrape off the walls with a razor blade if they wanted to hide it—or paint over it, of course.

We wasted a few minutes helping her complete the list.

“Róžyczka, we want you to climb out the transom window.”

“Oh, yes, I’ll run to Berlin and get a job as a showgirl,” she said. We’d finished the list, but she’d started again, slapping paint on the shelves and counters, which would be a darn sight harder for anyone to scrape clean than the walls.

“Be sensible. We want you to find a way to get us out. Find some wire cutters, a screwdriver, a crowbar—hand us in some tools and maybe we can break out of here.”

“I’ll get eaten by dogs!”

“If we see them coming, we’ll throw paint pots at them. Come on, Rabbit, earn your keep! Get up there and get out of here.”

We hoisted her up to the transom. She stood on Irina’s shoulders and clung to the window frame, and then somehow

the three of us managed to push her feetfirst through the narrow opening. She giggled maniacally, leaning over the transom back into the room, looking down at us from above.

“Oh, *hell*, it’s cold out here, this is SO UNFAIR—” Róza wriggled her way out and lowered herself down. We watched her collapse in a heap of bones and threadbare wool on the concrete wasteland just outside the window. At least the snow wasn’t sticking, except on the plane.

Róza pulled herself to her feet and banged on the glass.

“Keep painting!”

Then she scuttled off in her lopsided lurching bunny hop, supporting herself against the side of the building.

There wasn’t anything else useful for us to do while we waited, so we obeyed Róza’s last order. We covered the windows with names. And the steel door. And the floor. We’d begun on the ceiling when the bolts in the lock on the door started to click.

I froze. Irina leaped down from the counter and positioned herself beside the door, armed with a paintbrush.

But it was only Róza coming back. Irina let out a soft whistle.

“They left the key in the door!” Róza said. “To make it easy for whoever they send for us. We’re dead anyway. We’ll never get through the fence—it’s all patrolled and they’ve shut the gate. The only thing we can do is hide, and that’ll just make them madder when they find us. Actually, it’ll make them use the dogs to find us.” Suddenly she sounded defeated. “I’m not going to hide.”

“Neither are we,” I said. “Come on.”

“*Dogs!*” Róza protested.

“Just *come on*.”

We locked the door behind us, to confuse things and maybe buy us a minute or two extra time. The Stork wasn’t guarded. There wasn’t any reason for it to be guarded. It never occurred to anyone we might try to *steal a plane*. It wouldn’t have occurred to anyone on that airfield, in a million years, that two of us were pilots. Probably when I got out of that Stork six

months ago it didn't occur to anyone on that airfield that I was a pilot.

In the back of my mind, I began thinking about Karl Womelsdorff—I wondered if he was still alive, or shot down by enemy aircraft—*our* aircraft. Or if, like me, he'd been taken prisoner.

"No no no no no no I *won't*—"

Róza fought like a little kid as we scuttled across the apron in the gloom, dragging her with us and trying to stay low. She tried to scratch and bite, and we had to hold her arms behind her back.

"I won't I won't I won't—"

"Darn it, Róza, keep it down!" I growled.

"I won't get in that thing!"

"Then we will leave you for the dogs and the gas chambers!" Irina said brutally. "I will drop you *right here* if you don't stop fighting!"

Róza stopped fighting, but she began to weep.

"What the hell is wrong with her?" Irina demanded, because Róza *never* cried. We were both gasping with the effort of manhandling her. The ground was slippery with hidden patches of ice, and the snow flurries were beginning to stick. The longer we were there in the open, the more likely we'd be noticed. Although I don't think it looked like we were protecting Róza—more like we were hauling her away to be punished somewhere. Maybe I *did* look like an SS secretary—a skinny, miserable, worn-out drudge, somebody who'd had to drop everything and run out after this little creep who'd stolen a pen or something, and I'd left my office so fast I hadn't even bothered to put on a coat.

"I think she's afraid of flying," I said.

Actually, I was *sure* she was afraid of flying, because that is exactly how Polly acted last year before I left for England, when I tried to bully her into flying with me. But Róza wasn't going to get a choice.

We dragged her beneath the Stork's wings. We crouched by the fuselage, hiding between the ridiculous long front wheels,

lying on the ground just the way we'd lain beneath the military trucks earlier. Irina gave Róża a quick, harsh lecture in Russian, I think, which I know that Róża understood. Róża spat venom back at her in Russian the way she'd done on the night last October when Irina invaded our row for the first time.

"Enough of this."

Irina stood up close to the plane, under the high wing. She tried the door. Róża and I heard the latch click.

"Get up," I told her. "I'm going to get in first, in the front. You get in the back after me and wait for Irina. When she jumps in, get out of her way as fast as you can. You'll have to sit on her lap."

"Why can't *you* sit in the back?" Róża wailed. "I want *you* to sit with me!"

"Irina's stronger than me. She has to start the plane. She's got to swing the propeller."

"Start the plane! Who's going to fly it?"

"Well, I am, Różyczka," I said apologetically. And then, in self-defense, "I've flown this plane before."

Irina climbed up to the wings to sweep off the snow and check the fuel tanks.

"Hard to see," she called down. Then a second later, as she dipped her finger in, she exclaimed in astonishment, "Full! But why—"

"It's got an auxiliary fuel tank, too. Did you see that? That's new."

Irina checked. It was also full.

"The pilot of this plane maybe knows something we do not," she suggested drily.

She was right, of course; the Allies crossed the Rhine *the next day*. I don't know if the Neubrandenburg Stork was all set that night for an escape mission or a rescue mission or a spy mission, but it sure was loaded up and ready for someone to fly it. We were *so lucky*. Without the auxiliary tank, without full fuel, we'd have never made it over the Front.

"How will you go? Due west?"

"Gosh, no, we'll end up in Holland. It's still under German

control! Southwest,” I said firmly. The headings of that flight across Germany are imprinted on my brain forever. “Toward Paris.”

Irina gave a wild laugh at last. “*To Paris!*” She jumped to the ground. “Are you tied in? If I start it, and you cannot hold the brakes, leave me.”

“I’ll hold the brakes,” I said. “There are straps on the pedals for your feet.”

It was so gloomy now, and the snow so fitful, that I couldn’t see Irina standing in front of the plane. I could hear her, though—the grunt of effort as she hung her not-very-substantial weight on the edge of the propeller, and the dull *thunk* as the engine turned over without firing.

I have always really hated swinging the prop, or waiting for someone else to do it. Daddy never let me do it myself until I was eighteen anyway—he finally showed me how just before I left for England, in case I had to do it when I got there. I don’t know how Irina did it—or how I held the brakes so she didn’t get chopped in half when the engine finally fired. It helped to have my feet strapped to the pedals so they had no chance of slipping.

Irina came bounding in and slammed the door.

“Go, go!”

Where would we go?—Lido. To the beach on the beautiful Adriatic Sea.

It didn’t matter. I was going to get Róza out of here after all, anywhere. For Karolina and Lisette. For all of them. A living witness, living evidence. I opened the throttle and cranked down the awnings. Irina and I pulled back the control columns in front and back together—neither one of us would have been strong enough to get that tail up on our own. But the Stork leaped into the sky, straight off the apron. There was a faintly lit compass in the control panel, and I made a long, steady turn toward the south.

“How is Róza?” I asked. I could still hear her sobbing.

“No help,” Irina grunted. “Stay low. We will be harder to see from above.”

The dusting of snow highlighted the fields around the

German airfield in the darkness.

“Good,” Irina yelled from the back. “Good visibility! The snow will help if it is not too heavy. Light clouds, high moon. Full, too, or almost full!” She was right—it was easier to see than I’d expected.

“No chasers,” she added briefly. Then the plane lurched as she leaned over my seat again to see out the front, and hauled the sobbing Róza up beside her. “*Look—there! Look!*”

Ravensbrück at 800 feet was like a beacon, a glaring, self-contained bonfire of harsh white light in the blacked-out landscape—the lights of the *Lagerstrasse*, the column of red sparks from the crematorium chimney, the blue-white beams of the anti-aircraft searchlights.

“That’s it?” Róza said. “That’s *us*? That’s what the American bombers see!”

She clambered forward, hanging perilously over my shoulder and staring.

“It doesn’t look very big from up here!”

“I know,” I said. “I know. But—”

I couldn’t let myself cry. I was *flying*. I clenched my teeth and muttered in the back of my throat.

“Are you doing the counting-out rhyme?”

“*No.*”

“Is it you, or Millay?”

“*Millay.*”

“Say it so we can hear.”

I choked out the last lines of “Dirge Without Music.”

“Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve. *And I am not resigned.*”

I turned. I didn’t want to fly into the searchlights. I told Irina the new heading.

It was a pilot’s pinpoint. That’s all.

I knew we didn't have enough fuel to get to France, even with an extra tank. I knew this because of having to refuel last September, halfway to Neubrandenburg, when Womelsdorff brought me there. And when we were flying back, I didn't have any accurate way of measuring *time*. Irina made Róza count, just to keep her occupied, but we were basically faking it. Róza fell asleep eventually anyway, which was a good thing because it meant Irina was able to do some of the flying. We took turns. It wasn't hard work, once we were in the air, but I couldn't have done it all myself. I really couldn't.

I tried to fly parallel, but farther north, to my original course. I did a pretty good job because we ended up somewhere in Belgium before we ran out of fuel. You could see every single place they were bombing—all of Germany on fire, the sky stained red in the distance. And we *knew* when we came to the Front because we could *see it*. Fire and tracer and searchlights in one long line that just stretched on and on and on like a wall of shifting, glittering light in front of us.

It was beautiful, really, fireworks and bonfires, but terrifying. And we'd been flying for what, three or four hours through the burning night before we got there? If my flight *into* Germany made me wonder if I was in purgatory, the flight out of Germany was pure hell. We'd left one of the prisons in hell, we'd flown all night through hell, and now there on the horizon ahead of us was the boundary—the gates of hell.

Irina said so, looking at it as we approached the Front.

"L'enfer."

She said it in French, so she wasn't even cursing, just stating the facts. We're in hell.

I must have pulled back the control column instinctively, trying to go higher, to get away from the guns. Irina pushed the plane nose forward again from her controls in the rear seat, keeping us level.

"I will fly," she told me. Because even if she counted my flying bomb as a *taran*, she knew I wasn't a combat pilot. And she knew we were about to get guns fired at us.

We didn't get hit, and I'm not sure they shot at us on purpose, or even which side was doing the shooting. Irina just

kept smoothly on course, steady as—well, steady as a fighter pilot, I guess; as steady as *Daddy*—straight across one of the darkest stretches of the line of fire, until the noise was behind us, though we never really lost the orange light on the horizon.

We didn't even wake the sleeping Rabbit.

"Now you can land in one piece!" Irina said cheerfully.

Oh well. I did my best. I didn't break any of *us*, anyway. We landed in a field in the dark. It was not my best landing ever, for many reasons—exhaustion and inexperience being the main reasons, I guess—but the plane came down the right way up, if not entirely in one piece (I smashed the wheel struts and the prop). We all got violently bounced around—none of us were strapped in (only my feet were strapped in!)—and when everything had become quiet and still in the dark, Róża untangled herself from Irina and hurled herself at me like a rabid squirrel.

"I hate you, Rose Justice, I hate you, and I am never getting in another airplane as long—"

Irina grabbed hold of her by the back of her neck, hauled her away from me, and gave her a wallop across the face that was as brutal as anything she'd ever got from an SS guard.

"You Russian BITCH!" Róża screeched.

Irina slapped her again, not quite as hard. Irina said in fury, *"You are alive. You are over the Front. You and your skinny Rabbit legs are safe with the Allies."*

She switched to Russian for the rest of the lecture, and Róża screeched back at her in Russian, and then *I* began to cry. Irina heaved an impossible sigh, probably remembering her last crash landing, when she'd been captured. Róża scrambled around, trying to open the door of the plane, and discovered a thick woolen Luftwaffe overcoat that had been jammed behind the backseat until the heavy landing.

"You want to get out?" Irina said neutrally. "Or we could just sleep here, where it is warm—"

Róża laughed until she broke off choking. "Oh, so now that I've got a decent coat I'm supposed to stay in the plane with the crazy *taran* pilots!"

"Oh, *Różyczka*." I sighed, too. I didn't know how to explain

to her that she could *stop fighting* now. Or stop fighting *us*, anyway. “This plane isn’t going anywhere else tonight.”

So all three of us jammed into the back in a pile, sharing the luxury of the Luftwaffe overcoat. I was asleep in about thirty seconds, and didn’t wake up until the local truants found us there after it got light the next morning. Not their fault they were truants, I guess. Their school gym was full of refugees.

Trust small boys to be the first people to turn up at a crash site!

That was near the end of March. I think it was a little more than two weeks between when we left and when I got to Paris in the middle of April, and it is early May now. I have been here for three weeks—as utterly out of touch with the world as when I was in prison—maybe *more* out of touch. I know that President Roosevelt just died, because Fernande told me so. But I knew more about the Allied advance when Lisette was tuning in to clandestine radio broadcasts.

You know how sometimes you just keep going and going, and then, when you get a chance to rest, you collapse with the flu or something like that? That’s what happened to me after we landed. I woke up in the back of the Stork with the scratchy beginnings of a sore throat, and by midmorning I had a streaming cold, after waiting absolutely forever for the kids to go away and come back with someone’s big sister who could tell us for sure that we were in Belgium. *We’d made it*. The whole place was supposedly crawling with Americans because they kept sending weapons and soldiers to the Front through the town, and bringing wounded soldiers back the same way.

When did it really sink in? Not that day—not that week. On our first day of freedom, we spent a couple of hours sitting on someone’s doorstep drinking fake coffee and eating minuscule slices of bread with nothing on it—the people whose house it was wouldn’t let us farther inside, and I don’t blame them. Later that day we had to walk a mile or so to the school that the Americans had set up as a refugee center. But there weren’t any Americans there that day. The middle of the town was nothing but one big, dusty crater. The nearest working telephone was

said to be twenty miles away. Everyone looked like ghosts, and already we were letting ourselves be herded again.

We waited in the school for not quite two weeks, and then an American convoy came through and Bob Ernst picked us up—he was with the convoy that took us to the Swedish Red Cross unit, the night before Bob brought me to Paris. I don't remember much about the first two weeks in the school. It was like after being let out of the Bunker—a lot like that. For about five days I had a fever so high it would have got me admitted to the *Revier*, and I coughed so hard that two weeks later, when the Red Cross nurse checked me, she bandaged up my ribs because she thought I'd given myself stress fractures. She guessed I had bronchitis. My ribs still hurt now when I cough, but I got rid of the bandages when I took that first long bath.

Róża caught my cold, too, but she had something else wrong with her, and I still don't know what it was.

I mean, I do, sort of—she'd picked up an infection in her leg. Her right leg, the fragile one.

I *think* I can remember her announcing cheerfully, "Well, it's broken now! I'm not getting up again." She said this as she sat down next to me in the school gym holding two chipped, grubby mugs of cabbage soup, but I thought she was talking about the dishes. I *think* that she didn't get up after that—not without help. Irina quietly fed us and took turns dragging each of us to the ditch in the schoolyard a couple of times a day.

When I write it—and I know this is partly due to the gaps in my memory—it doesn't sound a lot different from what we'd escaped. It was the same kind of food, doled out sparingly, the same desperate toilet arrangements, the same incomprehensible babble of people shouting at you in a language you didn't understand. But there were two blankets between the three of us now, thick, scratchy US Army blankets—and the soup was salted sometimes—it wasn't full of dirt, because whoever made it actually cleaned the earth off the potatoes or turnips—and no one cared if we didn't get up all day. That was the real difference.

I should never have stuck to Bob Ernst like that. It was because I knew he was a reporter, and I wanted so badly to give him our story, even though I was never brave enough to begin.

We got going talking about my poems. He *sang* with me. I'm pretty sure, thinking back (and I don't remember it as clearly as I should), that what he meant about interviewing Róža was that it was the *Red Cross* who wanted to talk to her, not Bob himself. And of course they didn't want to tell her story in an international newspaper; they wanted to know how they could help her.

And somehow I ended up going with him in the front of the convoy, and twelve hours later when we stopped—

I can't believe I lost them.

Before the Red Cross camp, during that wonderful spring day when we were all together driving through the forest, riding in the back of Bob's jeep and singing the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," I asked Irina, "Why are *you* going to Paris?"

She shrugged. "It takes me away from the Red Army. I have no place to go. Why is Róža going to Paris?"

"I'm just sticking with my family," Róža said.

Because we were *all she had*.

This notebook—I can't believe I am the same person who wrote in this same notebook less than a year ago. I can hardly stand to think of my earnest last-summer-self sermonizing about heroism and how much fun it is to be part of a crowd. "Home for the living, burial for the dead." Irina will never go home. Elodie and Karolina will never be buried.

I thought I'd finished writing, and Edie is coming for me tomorrow, so I finally dared to skip back to the beginning of this notebook so I could read what I wrote about my Big Date with Nick—the one when I painted my delectable toenails with Cherry Soda nail enamel. And when I opened this book to the front, I found the letters from Maddie. They were tucked in a little cardboard pocket inside the cover of this beautiful fat notebook, which is why I hadn't found them before. I've been so obsessed with what I'm writing and so scared to look back that I just didn't notice they were there.

Nick is married. He is *married*. Married to some other girl—he didn't even wait till the war was over.

All that time I was alive, all that time I was—all I've seen, all I've had to do—cartloads of skeletal dead women, gas chamber paint in my ears, Karolina and Irina fighting over my coat, the list of mutilated girls stuck in my head, crumbs of stale bread for Christmas dinner, that day of *Strafstehe*n in the snow, twice *Fünfundzwanzig*—telling fairy stories about him rescuing us! We'd never even split up—he *proposed* to me on our last date! And he went and *married someone else*.

And if I did come back,
what in return could I offer to you,
who used to make so free
with my softness and kisses and verse
as if it were your due?
Imagine me
on your doorstep—would you laugh in the old way
and greet me lovingly:
Hello, it's been a long time,
how are you today?

There won't be anything to say.

I did stop dreaming he was touching my hair, and all I dreamed about was bread. But he could have *waited*. He could have waited till the war was over.

My gosh, how Różyczka would laugh.

Fernande took away my Camp clothes about a week ago. This morning she returned what she found in my pockets, all the pointless things I'd stuffed there in a panic before I left Ravensbrück: a couple of poems I'd managed to write down, a paper airplane decorated with a silly drawing of Lisette nitpicking my scalp in the pilot's seat, a pencil stub. Irina's airplane, Karolina's drawing of Lisette. Nothing of Róża. And the half of Aunt Rainy's hanky that Elodie embroidered for me with the blue rose and our flags and our initials.

I can't believe that this is all I get—a torn handkerchief and

a drawing on half a piece of folded paper. That these scraps of garbage are all I have left of *any* of them. And there isn't a thing I can do about it—maybe not ever.

I'm not going to go home, either.

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Part 3
NUREMBERG

Craig Castle, Castle Craig, Scotland

December 23, 1946

I am thinking about that line from the first paragraph of the Declaration of Independence—the words they made me write at the Amercian Embassy last year to prove that I am really Rose: *A decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.*

DARN IT. *Declare the causes.* That is another way of saying, TELL THE WORLD.

It is a year and a half since I got back from Germany, and I haven't really told the world. I have been fooling myself about it for a while. I gave the Rabbits' names to the US Embassy. *Olympia Review* published most of my Ravensbrück poems—but not "Service of the Dead," "Gas Leak," or "The Ditch," which the poetry editor, Sue Parker, thought were all just too *nasty* to print. It says in her letter: *We feel these are so grotesque that they detract from the lyrical sensitivity of your other poems.* And I didn't argue.

To be fair to Parky, she called the other poems "magnificent" and had the inspired idea of combining "The Subtle Briar" with the counting-out rhyme of the Rabbits' names. But it was easy going along with her editorial suggestions. I didn't have to do anything except type them up for her. She forwarded all the nice letters that came in to the magazine afterward, and she didn't let me read the ones accusing me of "sensationalism" and "false reporting."

When the Mount Jericho Rotary Club asked me to come and talk to them, I was able to say no because I live in Scotland now and it was too far for me to travel. But when the English Department of the University of Edinburgh got hold of a copy of the *Olympia Review* and wanted me to come read the poems aloud in one of their classes, I couldn't do it. *I couldn't do it.* I said I would, and I went, but I *couldn't do it.* I couldn't even stay in the classroom while someone else read them. The professor took me into his office and made me drink a glass of sherry while it was going on, and I went back in afterward when it was

over, and they all applauded very soberly. I said thank you and then ran away while they were getting out of their seats, before anyone could talk to me about the poems.

So much for telling the world.

But I just couldn't escape the ripples spread by the *Olympia Review*. The officials organizing the trials against the Ravensbrück administration managed to track me down as well. They asked me to come be a witness at the first Ravensbrück tribunal in Hamburg, in Germany, which has just started. Of course all this summer I was wolfing down the news of the international tribunal in Nuremberg, as the Allied governments tried and sentenced the high-ranking Nazi officials. If the invitation to the Ravensbrück trial had come a week earlier I'd have been nervous about it but I'd probably still have said, yes, of course I'll come. Unfortunately, I got the letter right after that Edinburgh University poetry-reading fiasco. I said no. When I got Lisette's letter a week later, I'd already weaseled out of it.

I have been feeling *miserable* about it ever since—I *am* a witness. I am a victim and a witness. And the Ravensbrück tribunals are being run by the British; so being an English-speaking witness, of English heritage, imprisoned while working for a civilian British organization, makes me a *valuable* witness. I *want* to be a witness. I want to be *responsible*. I want to keep my promises to the people I loved whose lives were violated and ruined. But I have never spoken aloud to *anyone* in detail about what happened to me at Ravensbrück. I made a life-and-death promise that I would, and I am scared to do it.

Also, at the Nuremberg tribunal they handed out a lot of death sentences. I want retribution for my friends, and for the millions like them whom I don't know about. But I am fearful of having a hand in anyone's death sentence. It may be just punishment for what they did—it may be the *only* just punishment. And the sentencing won't be my decision. But it seems like an empty victory to me, killing all the perpetrators. I want retribution, but so much more than that, I just wish everything could be put *right*.

I have *always* felt this way. Even before Ravensbrück. I put it in my "Battle Hymn of 1944" poem:

“Fight with realistic hope, not to destroy
all the world’s wrong, but to renew its good.”

Then I had the idea of doing a new story for *Olympia*. I wrote to Parky, telling her about the poetry-reading fiasco, and my cowardice about the trial, and Lisette’s suggestion that even if I didn’t go to Hamburg, I should go along to watch the Nazi Doctors’ Trial in Nuremberg—and I offered to go as a journalist for *Olympia*. I wouldn’t have to talk to anyone; I could just sit in the gallery with the other reporters and listen and take notes. It would be relevant to my studies as a medical student—I could write a report for my university tutor as well as for *Olympia*. I could help to “tell the world” from behind the mostly anonymous shields of my notebook and typewriter. Parky sent me the world’s most enthusiastic yes—she wired me money for a train ticket. So I went.

Now I’m back, and everything’s changed. Everything!

I’m not much of a journalist. But I didn’t get a chance to feel like an imposter at the Doctors’ Trial last week, because Dr. Alexander, the American medical expert, kept me so busy. The medical report for my tutor will be straightforward and mostly a matter of typing up my notes. The sizzling human-interest story is harder to write, especially since I ended up sitting in court for one day only. I’ve got an idea for how to tell it, though—how going to the Doctors’ Trial changed my mind about going to the Ravensbrück trial. I still don’t *want* to go and even if I *am* going now, I feel kind of ashamed and embarrassed for being such a scaredy-cat about it in the first place, but I’ll use this story for *Olympia* as a chance to defend myself.

I’m going to try writing a draft of it right here in my Ravensbrück notebook. It seems like the right place to do it. And that’s why Maddie gave it to me in the first place, after all, to bribe me with nice paper. There’s enough room left because the Ravensbrück bit is all written from top to bottom and edge to edge of every page in absolutely *minuscule* writing. I don’t remember doing that on purpose—in the back of my mind, I probably thought someone was going to take the paper away from me.

I like the idea that if I draft this article here, then the story

will be complete and in one place, even if the last part—the part I am about to write—gets typed up later and published somewhere else.

KITE-FLYING: FOUR PRINCIPLES OF FLIGHT

(by Rose Justice)

A pilot's greatest challenge is not bad weather or low fuel or getting lost. It's not even getting shot at. My greatest challenge is a friend who is afraid of flying.

I got my high school diploma six months early because I had a job in the British Air Transport Auxiliary, ferrying aircraft for the Royal Air Force in the spring of 1944 just before the Allied invasion of Normandy. Before I went to Europe, I decided I was going to take every one of my best friends from the girls' varsity basketball team for a joyride in one of my dad's Piper Cubs. It only has two seats, so this was a fun project, just me and my friends without my dad. We'd fly over their houses or over the Lake where we swam in the summer, or west to see the state Capitol building, and they'd take pictures, and then we'd get my dad to take a picture of us standing together by the plane afterward—laughing and windblown, arms around each other's shoulders, looking very pleased with ourselves.

It never occurred to me Polly would be any different from anybody else on the team. She didn't say anything. She was probably trying hard to be brave. After all, everybody else had gone flying with me, and they'd all come back safely, bubbling over with enthusiasm and snapshots.

So when Polly walked out to the plane with me, I didn't even know anything was wrong until she sat down on the brown winter grass of the airfield and burst into tears.

I thought she'd twisted her ankle!

"Hey, what's wrong?"

"I won't I won't I won't I won't I won't—"

"Won't what?"

"I won't get in that kite! I don't want to go anywhere *near* it! I *told* you I didn't want to come—"

She had, sort of, but she'd made it sound like her *mother* didn't want her to come.

I knelt down next to her and put my hand on her shoulder. "Don't worry! It's not scary getting in, and there are shoulder

straps. The cockpit shuts up tight just like a little car. It's so beautiful in the air! If you close your eyes while we're taking off —"

Polly, my best friend, socked me in the eye.

That might have been the biggest shock of my entire life up to that point. In a million years I wouldn't have guessed that my best friend could possibly be *so scared* of something that she'd *punch me in the face* for trying to talk her into doing it.

I burst into tears. Polly was already crying. After a moment she clapped her hands over her mouth and gasped, "Rosie—I'm *so sorry*! Gosh, we're like second graders pulling each other's hair! I just—"

She didn't actually pack much of a punch. It had just been such a surprise. I laughed shakily and said, "No, *I'm* sorry, and you should have told me you were scared! I wouldn't bully you into doing something you're that scared to do—it's supposed to be a treat! It's not important enough to *make* you do it!"

I really believed that when I said it to Polly. It was true for Polly. I guess it's still true for Polly, but under other circumstances—sometimes it *is* important enough.

1. LIFT

My sense of who I am is partly based on the fact that I learned to fly when I was twelve. But there are a lot of other things that define me. I am a Pennsylvania Dutch Lutheran. I am a student at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, halfway through my second year of a bachelor of medicine degree. I am a published poet, in this magazine and one other, with two poems soon to be printed in the *New Yorker*. And according to the findings of the International Military Tribunal completed in Nuremberg three months ago, I am one of the millions of victims of Counts 3 and 4, War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity, brought against the Nazi leaders convicted there. I am one of the lucky ones, because I am still alive.

Marie Claude Vaillant-Couturier, whose testimony about the gassings at Auschwitz was so shocking that people listening in the courtroom took their headphones off so they couldn't hear the translation anymore, was my fellow prisoner at the Ravensbrück concentration camp for women. I was also there in the Ravensbrück infirmary, the *Revier*, counting bodies. I, too, am a witness. But I am not as brave as she is. I start to sweat when I think about standing up in front of a room full of newspaper reporters and helmeted soldiers and robed judges from four different countries, not to mention the twenty-some high-ranking Nazi leaders on trial there. When I was asked to appear as a witness at the Ravensbrück trial currently going on in Hamburg, I said no. And the shame of it is that I didn't see or suffer anywhere near as much as Mme. Vaillant-Couturier, because she was imprisoned at Auschwitz for over a year before being transported to Ravensbrück, and I was imprisoned at Ravensbrück for only six months. And Ravensbrück was an ordinary camp. Mostly.

After I got out of Ravensbrück, I locked myself in a hotel room for three weeks and wouldn't come out. I was scared of freedom. I was scared of *space*—of being in the open and of having to decide for myself where to go—and of having to talk to people, and of being stared at. I was also afraid to face my aunt, my elegant, gracious English aunt, who was supposed to

come collect me and fatten me up and put me on an ocean liner back to Pennsylvania, where I would, presumably, resume normal life.

My English aunt Edie is elegant and gracious, but she is also very, very smart. When she discovered that a friend of mine, fellow transport pilot Maddie Brodatt, was making a delivery flight to Paris only a couple of days after Edie had been planning to come get me, she asked my friend to meet me in her place. It was the second week of May in 1945.

Aunt Edie had taken the hotel room next to mine, so she gave it to Maddie instead. The rooms were connected by a pair of private communicating doors, so we could lock each other out if we wanted to. Maddie called from reception to let me know she'd arrived. I knew I didn't have a choice, and I was clean and respectably dressed by then, so I let her come up.

I'd been her bridesmaid the year before.

When I opened the door, she stood for a moment staring at me as if she didn't recognize me—or as if she thought I'd disappear in a puff of smoke.

I stepped aside to let her in. We didn't hug each other. She said, "Oh, Rose!" in a pained voice, and I tried to smile at her.

"I'm okay. They didn't feed us very well." (I was still less than two-thirds my normal weight.) "And I just had bronchitis, and—well—my hair's growing back."

I touched my own head with both hands. "They shave your hair off—" I stopped. I couldn't explain.

"Because of nits?"

"No, just to make you miserable. The last time they did it to me was because I was humming during roll call. It's okay—really, it's—"

"*Stow it, Rosie,*" she said very gently and persuasively, and took me by the elbow and made me sit down at the vanity table by the open window, where I'd been pouring out the story of my imprisonment in pen and ink for the past three weeks.

"What's the view like?" Maddie asked. The drapes and shutters were closed because everything was still under blackout restrictions; we were still at war.

“Fantastic. Turn out the lights and we can open the curtains. Not much to see in the dark, though.” Maddie followed my orders and then stood behind me with her hands on my shoulders. There was no light in the Place Vendôme, but it was so open and so dark that it seemed like the whole sky was on fire with starlight.

“You know we are staying in the former Luftwaffe headquarters!” Maddie exclaimed suddenly.

“Oh!” It hadn’t occurred to me. “I never thought about it being the Luftwaffe.”

“How could you not!”

We both laughed a little. “I haven’t been out since I got here,” I confessed.

“What, not even in that smashing bar in the courtyard? This place is swarming with Americans! Journalists and war correspondents, lots of writers! You should be talking to people, sharing your poems!”

I shook my head. “All those strangers staring. I couldn’t.”

“Golly, Rose, I’ll go with you tonight. We need to celebrate. Germany surrendered this morning. Everyone at the airfield was over the moon! General De Gaulle is going to make an official announcement here in Paris tomorrow afternoon—it’ll be a holiday *everywhere*.”

And there was Arcturus, rising over the other side of the square, just like Karolina had told me we would see it in the spring when the war was over.

Karolina was dead. I started to cry.

We didn’t go to the bar. Maddie stayed with me in my room, and I let her read what I’d written over the past three weeks.

It was so easy just to hand over the notebook. I didn’t have to talk about what had happened to me, I didn’t have to burst into tears or go red or stammer or choke up and not be able to get any further. I just gave her my notebook, and she read it and she knew.

I went to sleep before she finished, and when I woke up in the middle of the night, she was sitting next to me on the bed,

with the bedside light on and my notebook propped against her knees, still reading. She didn't know I was awake—I was curled up because I always sleep curled up now, a habit of trying to keep warm when there's no mattress and no blanket, no glass in the window below you and no fuel in the coal stove on the other side of the barrack. I was turned away from Maddie, but I could feel her there next to me, warm against my back, and hear the flutter of paper every now and then; she turned pages with one hand, because her left hand was on my shoulder, just resting there firmly, and I could see the light in the ruby on her old French wedding ring.

I thought, Thank goodness I won't have to explain anything. She'll understand. And I went back to sleep, *so glad* to have someone next to me. Because even though the six months at Ravensbrück had been nothing but a battle for sleeping space on the bare bunk slats, those people crowded next to you were the only warmth and the only comfort you could get. And I missed them like crazy.

I wish it could always be that easy. I wish I never had to tell anyone and they would just *know*. I wish I could always have someone next to me.

The church bells didn't wake me, but the sound was in my ears and head when I woke up again—all the bells in Paris. The official announcement wasn't supposed to come till three o'clock in the afternoon. Nobody cared. The war was over and all the bells were already ringing.

Maddie had gone back to her own room and shut the communicating door behind her, so I got dressed in the worn, neat skirt and blouse the pitying chambermaid had given me—her missing daughter's clothes—and knocked on Maddie's door. She opened it almost immediately, and this time we threw our arms around each other. And this time both of us began to cry.

"Come on!" Maddie said. "Come on, we're going out."

I shook my head, but she had me by the arm and took advantage of me being easy to bully. It was stupidly easy to bully me then—I would follow directions meekly, without tears, cowering. That is how the chambermaid finally forced me to get

dressed after my first two weeks of hermitlike so-called freedom.

Hanging on to my arm, Maddie stuffed her flight bag with chunks of French bread off the breakfast tray they'd grown used to sending me (she'd taken it in earlier), then grabbed her Air Transport Auxiliary uniform tunic and forced me into it.

"No no no, I'm not a First Officer—"

"No one will know or care. You are an ATA pilot and you are going to look like one."

She gave me her side cap.

"*Wizard*. You look *perfect*."

Then she pulled on her leather flight jacket over her blouse and straightened her tie. "One uniform between the pair of us—that'll do! We both look the part, right?"

I nodded, trying to smile. Her tunic was a little too short and a little too broad for me, but she belted it tight around my middle, and it probably looked okay. Actually, it probably disguised how thin I was. We both wiped our eyes at the same time.

"Let's go. I'm taking you flying."

Maddie tucked her arm in mine. I didn't need propping up, but I needed someone hanging on to me, as though I were blind and couldn't see where I was going and had to be led. Out through the sumptuous lobby, which I took in as though I were seeing it for the first time, and into the May sunlight in the Place Vendôme. It was already full of people—kids sitting on shoulders, waving paper flags and wearing paper hats that people were selling out of buckets and boxes like they'd been saving them up for weeks, everybody so dressed up.

Maddie was shameless. I think she started out heading for the Metro, but we didn't make it across the square before she'd hitched a ride on a truck crowded with American pilots all waving and holding up two fingers in a V for "Victory."

"Le Bourget!" Maddie cried. "We want to get to Le Bourget!"

The ATA uniform worked its magic—even though we were sharing it.

“Come on up, sister!” They pulled us in with them.

For one long moment the world seemed hideous. The smell of engine exhaust and sweat, the bodies so close together—

Maddie, who’d been up most of the night reading about the prison where I’d spent the winter, held tight to my arm and cried out, “Let’s ride on the roof!” And they boosted us up on top of the cab like a couple of figureheads. It was precarious, but it was nothing like being in a prison transport truck, and I could breathe again.

It took us hours to get through the crowded main thoroughfares. But it was fun and like nothing I’d ever done before, sitting on the roof of a slow-moving military truck, clinging to my borrowed ATA cap—with my friend’s arm secure around my shoulders and an enormous bundle of lilacs in my lap (where did *those* come from?), and our brave boys blowing kisses at everyone and trying to learn the words to the French national anthem.

At Le Bourget there was a line of Dakotas taking off and landing. They were giving people rides. For the past month they’d been shuttling all over Europe—hospital supplies, social workers, bringing home prisoners of war and “civilian hostages”—thousands of people like me who’d been sent to concentration camps in the far corners of the continent and were trying to come home now. Maddie and I lined up with the other joyriders, and our shared uniform got us boosted up front with the flight crew. And off we went—low over the teeming streets of Paris, so low you could see the flags flying—so much red, white, and blue! The French Tricolor, the Union Jack, and the good old Star-Spangled Banner. There were Soviet flags in there, too. We sailed in stately flight up the Champs-Élysées, so low we could see the crowd waving as we passed overhead.

“Ever buzzed the Eiffel Tower?” the pilot shouted lazily over the whine of the engine.

“Rose did last year,” Maddie yelled. “Flying an Oxford. Two weeks after Paris was liberated!”

“Flying it *herself*?”

“Of course!”

The pilot glanced at me.

It's hard to describe what I looked like. I'm not even sure what I looked like; I covered up the mirror in my room when I got there, and that had been three weeks earlier. No doubt starved; no doubt exhausted, because I still had a lot of trouble sleeping. Probably haunted. My hair was only a little longer than the pilot's crew cut.

"I wanted to fly under it, but the plane wasn't really small enough," I said.

The pilot laughed and asked me in his casual drawl, "Ever flown a C-47?"

"Gosh, no, just light twin engines!"

"Well, you better give it a try, then," he said. "I reckon if you're smart enough not to fly under the Eiffel Tower in an Oxford, you won't risk it in this baby, either."

That is how I got to buzz the Eiffel Tower for the second time in the biggest plane I've ever flown.

We had to take the Metro back. I slept on my feet, lulled by the rhythm of the train and clinging to a strap hanging from the ceiling. I was used to dozing standing up, a skill acquired during interminable Ravensbrück roll calls.

It was dark by the time we got back to the Place Vendôme, Arcturus blazing above us. But now Paris, too, was blazing, lights everywhere, yellow light gleaming in open windows and strings of Christmas lights in balconies and in the trees. It was spring and the war was officially *over*. Maddie pulled me, half awake, into the glittering leafy night of the Ritz's private inner courtyard and found a single chair for us to share.

We held hands. I knew she was thinking about her best friend, who was killed in France a little over a year ago. But it was nice to be there with Maddie—this half stranger who knew me so well, who didn't have to be told anything about me.

She said suddenly, "Julie would have died there. I read what you wrote. She'd never have made it. She'd have died there."

She squeezed my hand. "But you didn't."

Within five minutes, a young American civilian presented us with a bottle of champagne. I nearly fell off the chair with shock. It was Bob Ernst, the man who'd driven me to Paris last month.

"Nice to see you again, Rose Justice," Bob said, grinning from ear to ear and holding out his hand. He shook hands with me warmly. "Who's your friend?"

I gulped and remembered how to be polite. "This is Maddie Beaufort-Stuart. She flew with me in the ATA."

"You're a pilot, too, Maddie!" he exclaimed. "Never met a flygirl in my whole life, and Rosie knows 'em all." He poured and handed out glasses.

"Victory!"

"Victory!"

I took a sip—the first sip was *awful*. The contrast with the months of turnip soup was so extreme, and the last time I had champagne was on a date with the boy who'd got married to someone else while I was in prison—I'd only found this out a couple of days ago. With the first sip my anger at that thoughtless betrayal hit me again like a kick in the ribs, and I made a face like I'd never drunk champagne in my life.

Bob laughed. "It's the idea of the thing." He didn't have a chair. The place was packed. He squatted down next to us.

"What are you doing here?" I asked. Bob had picked me up at a refugee center in Belgium, with Irina Korsakova and Róża Czajkowska, the prisoners who had escaped with me.

"Looking for you, Rose," he said seriously. "I've been looking for you ever since I waved good-bye to you at the embassy. I thought I'd never forgive myself for not making sure you were safe."

I put my glass down on the crowded table we were sharing with about a dozen other people. I stared at Bob.

"Looking for me?"

"I knew you were here at the Ritz, and you hadn't checked out," he said. "They wouldn't tell me what room you were in—fair enough—and I would have felt pretty underhanded watching the lobby to catch you going in and out. So I thought

I'd sit in the bar in the evening, and maybe you'd come down one night. As long as you were still checked in, you might come down. So I waited. And you did."

I didn't say anything at first. Finally I asked the only thing that mattered. "Did you look for my friends?"

Because that was what I was most upset about: losing Irina and Róza. It was mostly my own fault. But a little part of me blamed it on Bob, for taking me away from them without my realizing that they weren't traveling with us in the back of our convoy.

"I did look for your friends," he said. "I managed to get the unit details of the Red Cross folks we camped with. One of the wounded GIs remembered it. But I don't know where they are now. Probably still on their way back to Sweden—I think it'll take them a while because they were stopping along the way to set up field clinics, like the one we camped with. They're off the US Army's beat, that's for sure. I tried contacting their HQ in Stockholm, but I always get blindsided by the girl on the switchboard. And I don't know your friends' last names, or how to spell their first names—how are they going to find Russian Irene and Polish Rosie among tens of thousands of refugees they're relocating? When things settle down, we might have better luck. It's been making me crazy. They can't just *disappear*."

We had their unit details.

It was a start.

Maybe Bob thought I was upset with him, because he added quickly, "The real reason I'm in Paris is that I'm on an assignment for my paper—I think I told you that. But I've got a sort of more creative personal project I'm working on now, too—it's a story for a literary journal out of Olympia University in Ohio, about people coming home. I got the idea after I dropped you off. I couldn't stop thinking about you and your team. So since then I've started talking to others like you."

"Like me?"

"You said you'd been in prison in Germany, but you were in a camp, right? You weren't a prisoner of war. You're a civilian. So I guessed you must have been in a concentration

camp. There are plenty of camp survivors in Paris, on their way home, men and women both. You get an eye for spotting them.”

“We’re all skeletons,” I said, and looked away, my face burning.

“No,” Maddie suddenly interjected. “It’s somewhat in the eyes. You look like you’re in shock.”

Bob slapped the table and everyone’s glasses tinkled. “That’s it exactly. The POWs from the military prison camps are skinny, too, but anyone who’s been in the concentration camps—they all look a little crazy.” He bit his lip and reddened. “Sorry. Not you.”

“It’s okay. I bet I do. I bet that’s how you figured it out.”

I *felt* a little crazy.

“Well,” Bob said, leaning back on his heels, “I’m telling you this because you said you wrote poetry, and I thought you might want to send something to the poetry editor at my magazine. It’s quarterly, and they’re doing a special issue focused on the war—social issues, how the war’s affected education, things like that. There’s a story about the massacre of university staff in Poland and a story about the past five years of Hollywood films, so you get some idea how flexible they’re being. If you wrote anything this year—”

Maddie leaned across me and coolly accepted the offer on my behalf, as though she were my literary agent. “She’ll take your card.”

He had it ready and waiting in his breast pocket. I felt a little bit like a starlet being discovered by a director. I nodded. I didn’t smile, but I let him know I’d consider it. Maybe this was the way I could tell people about it—without having to say anything, just the way I’d given my notebook to Maddie.

“I’ve got a few new poems,” I said cautiously. I wasn’t convinced any of them were good enough to be published in a literary magazine. I wasn’t convinced any of them would even make *sense*, outside Ravensbrück.

“That’s my girl,” Bob said, and refilled our glasses.

I picked mine up again and took a tentative sip of victory champagne. I remembered now I’d drunk champagne at Maddie’s wedding, too, and it tasted better when I was prepared

for it. It wasn't sweet but *exciting*—new and exotic and sparkling, but dry and cold, too—like everything that day, joy mixed with *agony*.

“Thank you!” I said, and held my glass to Bob and Maddie and the light. “Thank you for waiting.”

There are four forces that work together if you want to put something into the sky and have it stay there. One of these is *lift*.

Lift is made when the air pressure under a wing is greater than the air pressure over the wing. Then the wing gets pushed upward. That's how birds fly. That's how kites fly—a kite is basically just a solitary wing. That's how airplanes fly.

But people need lift, too. People don't get moving, they don't soar, they don't achieve great heights, without something buoying them up.

There's nowhere else in the world I'd have rather been to celebrate victory in Europe than in Paris on VE Day, but I don't know if I'd feel the same if it hadn't been for my friends Maddie and Bob generating *lift* for me—buoying me up at the heavy ebb of my life.

2. WEIGHT

Each force in flight is balanced by an opposing force. The opposite of lift is *weight*. Weight is always trying to pull an object back to earth, so to get something to stay *up*, lift has to be greater than weight.

You'd think your weight would always be the same, but it isn't. When you do aerobatics or go into a dive—like a kite that's plunging into the sand at the beach—there's an increase in gravity, and that makes you weigh *more*. If you want your heavy kite to stay in the air, you have to increase the lift, as well. Maybe by waiting for a stronger wind. Maybe by finding a windier place to fly your kite.

Maddie brought lift back into my life by forcing me outside. So did Bob, who introduced me to the editors of this magazine. So did Fernande, the chambermaid at the Paris Ritz, who gave me her daughter's clothes and made me get dressed and brought me coffee every morning for three weeks. So did the American Air Force pilot who let me take over the controls of his C-47 so I could fly it in long, lazy circles around the Eiffel Tower over the cheering crowds on VE Day.

My dad sends me an allowance and pays for me to rent a plane from time to time at a civilian flying club outside Edinburgh. I can't find work as a pilot—there are so many of us cooling our heels with nothing to do now that the war is over. Plenty of women with more experience than me get turned down for the few instructor and air taxi jobs available. The new commercial airlines aren't interested in women except as hostesses. But my dad, who taught me to fly, wants to make sure I don't get rusty.

I can't work as a pilot anyway, because the university is taking most of my time and a huge amount of effort, too. And I like Edinburgh, except for the weather. I already had friends in Scotland when I moved here, and now I have more. I am healing. I have scars that show and scars that don't. Even when you're flying high and steady, the weight doesn't go away—it's just balanced by lift. I have worked pretty hard over the past year and a half to keep my life in balance. But the weight's still

there, waiting for an increase in gravity to pull me earthward again.

There was one factor of weight last year that was sometimes so heavy it made me curl on the floor in front of the tiny coal fire in my tiny student bed-sitting-room and sob. A year after escaping from Ravensbrück I still hadn't found my friend Róża. Or *anybody* I'd known at Ravensbrück. Half of the people I'd loved and fought beside in the concentration camp were dead, and I knew that, but I hadn't managed to find any of those I'd last seen alive, either.

In the end, they found me. I was, after all, the one who broadcast the distress signal—the one who fired the flares.

Lisette Romilly tracked me down. Lisette is also a writer, a much more successful and talented writer than me. About two months ago Lisette's editor at *Les éditions de Minuit* in Paris handed her the Spring 1946 edition of the *Olympia Review*. He thought Bob's concentration camp survivor story, "Half-Remembered Faces," would interest her—and also the young American poet Rose Justice's "Ravensbrück Poems."

Here is her letter to me:

22 October 1946

Happy birthday, my dear Rose!

How astonished I was to see on the printed page your poems, which I only know by heart! The biographical note at the end suggests you are well. You will understand both my delight and my anguish at finding you.

You may know that Róża is now working at the Polish Research Institute in Lund, Sweden, helping to translate and catalogue witness testimony as evidence in trials like the International Military Tribunal recently held at Nuremberg, where the high-ranking Nazi leaders were indicted, and the trials held elsewhere to convict those responsible for individual concentration camps. Trials for Ravensbrück staff are currently being organized by the British in Hamburg, and you may also be aware that three of the Ravensbrück doctors responsible for the medical experiments forced on the Lublin Special Transport will be tried with other Nazi doctors by an American court in Nuremberg in December.

I have suggested Róża go as a witness to Nuremberg with a number of other girls who were experimental “Rabbits” and who will be appearing at this American tribunal indicting the Nazi doctors. I myself am going to appear as a witness at the first of the Ravensbrück trials in Hamburg, so will miss the Doctors’ Trial in Nuremberg. Perhaps you will be able to go to Nuremberg yourself and see Róża there. I have also suggested that the organizers of the Hamburg trials contact you as a potential reliable and articulate witness to the atrocities committed at Ravensbrück.

I visited Róża in Sweden in the beginning of the summer. She is in good health and so appears much changed from the desperately crippled Rabbit we knew at Ravensbrück. She does not seem to enjoy her work,

but she is wholly obsessed with it. She still has not taken her high school diploma, which makes me a little sad as a teacher and her “camp mother”—however Róža is Róža.

She says that Irina is an air hostess with Sabena! She married a Danish pilot just after the war ended. I think it was a marriage of convenience—it conveniently prevented her from being sent back to the Soviet Union. I cannot imagine Irina content for long to run up and down the aisle of an aircraft, fetching pillows and mineral water for bankers and screen stars, when she really ought to be designing aircraft, but at least she is traveling the world and is back in the air.

I hope you are back in the air, too, my dear Rose.

Your loving friend,
Lisette

So it was Lisette who suggested me as a witness—Lisette, who knew better than anyone our duty to the living and the dead. But it was also Lisette who gave me the idea of going to Nuremberg to see Róža instead.

I squeezed all my end-of-term exams into one week so that I could be in Nuremberg for the second week of the Doctors’ Trial, the week that the Rabbits would be there. The *Olympia Review* advanced me a small stipend for my hotel stay, the train from Edinburgh to London, and the amazing boat train from London to Paris (it is called the Golden Arrow). My uncle Roger arranged an onward flight for me from Paris to Nuremberg with the US Army Air Force—not with Sabena, so I didn’t see Irina on board.

Maybe you’ve seen the Air Force moving pictures. Europe is in ruins. It is as visible from the air as it is from the ground. The only difference is that from the air you don’t see the grubby kids playing in the rubble and the old women gathering pieces of furniture to use as firewood and the piles of broken German planes stacked along the roadside waiting to be cleared. But from the air you really get the *extent* of it. Imagine if you took

the train from Philadelphia to Boston, and the whole way, all through New Jersey and through New York City and on up through coastal Connecticut and Rhode Island, all the way to Boston, just imagine if the *whole way* every city that you went through was smashed to smithereens. That's what it looks like. The entire East Coast turned into a demolition site.

We have heaped more destruction on the German cities than they have heaped on us, and that is the truth. Weight. Rubble to clear.

Nuremberg—it is correctly *Nürnberg* in German—is one of the cities that we hit hard. But it got chosen for the International Military Tribunal for war crimes because the Palace of Justice is still standing, with a good, secure prison still attached to it. And of course it is the symbolic center for the birth of Nazism, so it seems like a good place to restore things. The IMT earlier this year was run by the Allied powers. The Doctors' Trial is being run by the Americans—it's actually called "*United States of America v. Karl Brandt et al.*" The city of Nuremberg is still a wreck, and I was pretty much forbidden to go out of the hotel alone after I got there. I didn't see anything of the medieval city the whole time I was there, although I think it would have made me sad if I did—90 percent of it is destroyed.

I got driven to the train station to meet Róza. The GI who did the driving had a gun with him, so I felt pretty safe, but the medical expert from the tribunal, Dr. Leo Alexander, came along, too.

"I don't mind going by myself," I said.

"Neither do I," he said, smiling through his mustache. "We'll be braver together."

He'd been very kind to me ever since I arrived—warm but serious, an intense, earnest man *impassioned* with his job of interviewing and examining the Ravensbrück Rabbits and preparing their statements. That's the right word for it—*impassioned*. He was born in Austria and emigrated to the US in 1934, I think because he was Jewish; you could still hear the German accent (or Austrian or whatever it is). He was eager to meet Róza, the first of the Rabbits to arrive. She'd taken the train all the way from Sweden—it crosses the Baltic Sea on a

ferry, like the Golden Arrow. As far as I knew, Róża hadn't been in another airplane since the snowy night in March 1945 when I flew her out of Germany.

It took us a moment to recognize each other—even though Róża still had to walk with a supporting stick and she still had the crazed gleam in her eyes that Maddie and Bob had agreed on in the Ritz on VE Day. It was over a year and a half later, and she still had it.

She had to switch sides with her cane so she could shake hands.

"I am pleased to meet you, Dr. Alexander," she said in English.

"The pleasure is mine, Miss Czajkowska," he answered.

Róża held her cane hooked over her left arm, swinging it a little. She turned to me and held out her hand. She didn't smile or rush to swallow me in a bear hug, but I felt *everything* in our clasped hands, even through our gloves.

"Hello, Rose Justice," she said coolly.

It's no wonder I didn't recognize her. When I'd first met her she'd been so emaciated I'd thought she was about eleven. She wasn't any taller now, still petite, but so *curvy*—she wasn't carrying any extra weight, but there was nothing angular or pointy about her anywhere—all curves. She was incredibly lovely. I'd once seen a glimpse of that, but had never imagined I'd see her in her full glory. Her hair was exactly the color of caramel, coppery gold and gleaming, not long but stylishly permed and framing a face like a china doll's. She had on a camel-hair coat and a gray wool suit, dull but smart—and showing off all the amazing curves.

"Hello, Różyczka," I said—*little Rosie*.

We were subdued in the car going back to the hotel. The bomb damage isn't as obvious at night as it is in the daytime, but when you do notice it at night, it's eerier. A dark row of empty windows with stars shining through them. A big pale heap you think is a snowbank until you get close enough to see it's a pile of broken marble. A gray shadow like a naked torso crawling through the rubble in a vacant lot. By day you'd just see a scrap of newspaper fluttering aimlessly.

"I didn't think Germany would look like this," Róža said.

"All of Europe looks like this!" I exclaimed. "Haven't you seen?"

"Sweden doesn't."

Sweden was neutral during the war, of course—no bombs dropped on it.

Dr. Alexander leaned back from the front seat. "You won't mind spending time tomorrow going over your story in my office in the Palace of Justice, will you?" he asked Róža. "I have the daunting task of interviewing all the young ladies appearing as witnesses. I must also make an examination of your injuries. But it would be appropriate to conduct the exam after the other four 'Rabbits' arrive tomorrow, when you are all together. In the meantime we have only four days to prepare your statements, so I'd like to begin with yours tomorrow morning."

"All right," she answered softly.

As we climbed out of the car in front of the hotel, she whispered to me, "Are you going to be a witness also, Rose?"

"No, I'm going to be a reporter. I have to write a story for the magazine that published my Ravensbrück poems."

It was absolutely freezing—you felt like your breath was turning to ice when you talked. Róža didn't say anything. And suddenly I felt cold not because of the winter night, but cold inside.

The Róža I'd known at Ravensbrück had been a live wire of defiance and daring and desperate hope, the girl who'd taught me to curse like a sailor in five languages, who'd wisecracked instead of sobbed when she was told she was going to be executed the next day. Something was different. She seemed like a person who has been on a tear for a week and now has sobered up again.

The Grand Hotel in Nuremberg was crawling with reporters and soldiers but *not* with young, curvy, porcelain-complexioned girls, or even tall, angular ones. In fact, there weren't very many women there at all, because the US military had a halfhearted rule about not letting spouses come along, though some of the judges' wives were there helping out. It wasn't exactly like having French strangers grabbing kisses from any pretty girl on

VE Day, but Róza and I caused heads to turn. People smiled and nodded politely and held open doors and grabbed Róza's bag. People ushered us into the dining room and though my meals were included in my board, I'd have never had to pay for them even if they weren't, because people kept offering to buy us drinks and coffee and cigarettes.

There was a buffet. I carried both our plates so Róza could walk, one hand gripping her cane and the other pointing to what she wanted. We'd hardly said anything to each other since we got out of the car, though we'd smiled and thanked our entourage of helpful suited and uniformed men. But when we sat down across from each other at the little table over steaming plates of bratwurst sausages and potatoes, and another plate piled with a mountain of gingerbread *Lebkuchen*, which Róza had collected without my noticing, we both suddenly started to laugh.

"I eat by myself most nights, and everything is *still rationed* in Britain," I said. "I have one room and no kitchen, just the coal fire and a gas burner. Cheese on toast and bouillon cubes."

"I live in a boardinghouse. I have meals cooked for me!" Róza said. "As good as this, most of the time, but still—here we are! You and me in Germany, eating like kings!" She paused, and challenged in a low voice, "Bless this food, Rose."

This was more like the Róza I knew—everything she said heavy with hidden meaning. Lisette had *always* said a brief grace over our thin prison soup.

I sat up straight and sang a grace from Girl Scout camp. Not loud, but I sang.

*"Evening is come, the board is spread—
Thanks be to God, who gives us bread.
Praise God for bread!"*

There was delighted laughter and a scattering of applause from the nearest tables around us. Róza ducked her head demurely, one hand shielding her face beneath the short, shining caramel waves of her permed hair, as though I'd embarrassed her.

"You never taught us that one!" she accused.

"I forgot about it," I admitted. "I don't think I ever felt thankful enough to sing that one. I never really felt *thankful* to get food there—just relieved."

"We are both ungrateful wretches," Róža said. "But praise God for bread anyway. Praise God for *gingerbread*!"

It felt so strange to eat with her—to eat a real meal together. We had slept pressed against each other like sardines for six months. We had stood naked in the snow side by side for two hours because one of the female guards had lost a watch or something and they made our entire barrack line up outside and take all our clothes off so they could hunt for it. But we'd never sat at a table together and eaten a decent meal, not even after we got out. It made us both self-conscious.

"You're making me think I have to stuff it in before you take it away from me," Róža accused.

"*I know.*" And of course we'd never stolen food from each other, ever, which made the sensation of covetous greed very weird. We'd both been reasonably well fed for the past year and a half, and now we were in a restaurant in a fancy hotel. It had never occurred to me that simply being with a fellow prisoner would make me feel like I was still in prison.

We asked the hotel reception to fix it so we could share a room, which they were happy to do, because it freed up another room for the overflowing reporters and trial observers. When we got undressed for bed, Róža proudly showed off to me her Exhibit A legs.

"I broke my right leg in the refugee center in Belgium. This is the leg they took the bone samples from. It held for two and a half years in their Camp and then it broke, just like that, a week after I got out. I wasn't even doing anything—just carrying your soup across the gym hall for you."

I realized, suddenly, the notable difference about her—she'd stopped swearing.

She peeled her thick wool hose down to her ankles. "See? Here, in my shin. The new scar is where they operated on it in Sweden. I have a steel rod in there now, holding everything together. I couldn't stand up for four months!"

I took a deep breath. “I don’t know how I lost you, Róza.”

“Oh, well, I do.” She flung her hose on a chair. “You were crazy about that reporter. You forgot us the second you laid eyes on him.”

“I wanted to tell him all your names! I wanted to tell him about the Rabbits, about the experiments! You spent six months drilling everybody’s names into my head—Karolina and Elodie got dragged off to be gassed yelling that we should tell the world about it, that’s what Irina told me—and Bob was the first reporter I ran into! It was like he’d dropped out of the sky. And then I wasn’t brave enough to tell him anything.”

Róza laughed, not the old raucous cackle but a soft, regretful sigh of a laugh. The ghost of a laugh. “That was us dropping out of the sky, not him. Remember? We’re the ones who crash-landed.”

“I told the American Embassy your names,” I said defensively.

We turned out the lights. It was a little room with twin beds. We lay in the dark wide awake with the weight of where we were and what lay ahead of us pressing on us.

“Rose?” she said softly.

“Yeah?” I answered.

“It is just as strange to know you are there, and to be warm and comfortable, as it is to eat with you.”

“It really is.”

“Tell me ‘The Subtle Briar’ again,” she asked.

She knew I would still know it by heart.

I whispered to her in the dark.

“When you cut down the hybrid rose,
its blackened stump below the graft
spreads furtive fingers in the dirt.

It claws at life, weaving a raft
of suckering roots to pierce the earth.
The first thin shoot is fierce and green,
a pliant whip of furious briar

splitting the soil, gulping the light.
You hack it down. It skulks between
the flagstones of the garden path
to nurse a hungry spur in shade
against the porch. With iron spade
you dig and drag it from the gravel
and toss it living on the fire.

“It claws up toward the light again
hidden from view, avoiding battle
beyond the fence. Unnoticed, then,
unloved, unfed, it clings and grows
in the wild hedge. The subtle briar
armors itself with desperate thorns
and stubborn leaves—and struggling higher,
unquenchable, it now adorns
itself with blossom, till the stalk
is crowned with beauty, papery white
fine petals thin as chips of chalk
or shaven bone, drinking the light.

*“Izabela, Aniela, Alicia, Eugenia,
Stefania, Rozalia, Pelagia, Irena,
Alfreda, Apolonia, Janina, Leonarda,
Czeslava, Stanislava, Vladyslava, Barbara,
Veronika, Vaclava, Bogumila, Anna,
Genovefa, Helena, Jadviga, Joanna,
Kazimiera, Ursula, Wojciecha, Maria,
Wanda, Leokadia, Krystyna, Zofia.*

“When you cut down the hybrid rose
to cull and plough its tender bed,
trust there is life beneath your blade:
the suckering briar below the graft,

the wildflower stock of strength and thorn
whose subtle roots are never dead.”

Róza gave a long sigh. Then she whispered, “Rose, I really miss you.”

Róza spent most of Sunday telling her story to Dr. Leo Alexander—we had supper with him that night afterward, before the other Ravensbrück witnesses arrived. Everyone I met who was involved in the trial was friendly and straightforward, as though we were at a conference. This was not quite what I was expecting, but I think it is a result of everything being pulled together at the last minute. And although I wasn’t one of Dr. Alexander’s witnesses, he was interested in me, because I am a writer and a medical student, which is a less advanced version of what *he* is.

Róza told him at supper, “Rose could be a witness here. She has scars, too.”

He looked at me with sudden intense interest. “You *do*? An American witness?”

I shook my head violently. “I wasn’t operated on. I was just thrashed because I wouldn’t work. So was everybody who didn’t work, or who did anything else they didn’t like. We’re a dime a dozen and nothing to do with a trial for medical staff.”

“I hate to say it, but you’re right,” Alexander agreed. “I’ll admit I’ve already rejected several so-called witnesses exactly like you.” He turned his mild, smart gaze back to Róza. “You will likely have heard of the concept of *genocide*, a term coined by your countryman Raphael Lemkin, which the IMT used as a basis for their charges against the Nazi leaders? We are using a parallel concept in this trial: *thanatology*, the science of producing death. These men are being charged with *murder*. The charge is that their experimentation was designed to discover not how to heal, but ways to kill. Simply put, you’re a survivor of attempted murder. A punitive lashing, however ugly the scars may be, is, unfortunately, irrelevant.”

“I couldn’t show off my scars anyway!” I protested, taking refuge in being ridiculous to hide my cowardice. “What would I

do, step onto the witness stand in a bathing suit? A two-piece!"

"It would be *sensational*," Róža exclaimed.

"No one would notice any scars!" Dr. Alexander teased.

What a very weird dinner conversation.

The other Rabbits arrived. They were *all* as unrecognizable as Róža—well-fed, well-dressed, wearing their hair fashionably styled beneath new hats, smiling for the flashing press cameras at the train station. We hugged and kissed as if we were all long-lost family: Vladyslava, tall Maria, Jadviga, and little Maria, who'd had to stay in the *Revier* for a year and a half. I hadn't known any of them very well at Ravensbrück, but I knew their names. I'd hidden with Vladyslava and Jadviga in a pit dug beneath our washroom for two days. They'd hidden there with Róža for a week.

We were all on the bus to the Palace of Justice at eight thirty the next morning and stayed there till six p.m., and I didn't see much of anybody that day. I got asked "Can you type?" and I said yes, and suddenly I was part of the team landed with the tortuous job of organizing Dr. Alexander's notes as fast as he could hand us paper. I was set up in an office with the chief prosecutor's wife, who was also working there, because I wasn't allowed in the interview room with the Ravensbrück witnesses. Róža ran piles of paper back and forth between me and the rest of them, since she'd already been interviewed. I spent the first three days of that week in unwaged labor, gaining a little understanding of the trial and a lot more understanding than I'd ever wanted to know about the hideous things that had actually been *done* to Róža and the women I'd been imprisoned with.

The whole week was a race against time—the medical examinations, the interviews, translating everything from Polish to English to German, working out the order for the Rabbits' performance and practicing what they'd say, and then we had *one day* to present everything before the whole court shut down for its Christmas break. We were in the Palace of Justice every day, but we never went into the courtroom. We knew where it was; we got our ID checked and got ushered in and out of the

building with the reporters and observers every morning, and ate with them in the canteen in the basement; we gaped wide-eyed at the armfuls of headphones and the miles and miles of telephone wire that trailed everywhere as the IBM technicians struggled to keep the translations going around the clock.

Róza and I were standing outside the entrance in the forecourt on Thursday evening with a few other people, on the side with the trees, waiting for the shuttle bus to take us back to the hotel. Suddenly, Róza grabbed my arm and hissed in my ear, “Look, that’s Fischer. And that’s Gebhardt. *They did it.*”

She let go for one second to point. Soldiers were leading a group of the defendants somewhere—well-dressed, sober civilians under armed guard.

“Did what?” I asked.

“Tied me down in a prison cell and cut chunks out of my bones.”

I stared.

Being on the winning team gave us no strength. Róza clutched my arm, and there we were, standing in the dark in a flurry of German snow, and we might as well have been standing in the roll call square back in Ravensbrück.

“*That’s Oberheuser,*” Róza choked.

“*Shhh!*”

There wasn’t any reason to hush her. There wasn’t any reason except I felt instinctively that we’d be walloped for talking and pointing.

“Oberheuser’s the woman?” I whispered.

“Yes—she helped.” They were being led to a different entrance. I knew that Oberheuser was the only woman of the two dozen accused doctors. Right in front of us were all three of the Ravensbrück doctors, Gebhardt, Fischer, and Oberheuser—maybe going to a separate interview before the Ravensbrück witnesses gave their testimony the next day.

There was another woman who had come out with the others but was now left guarded on her own. She stood hopping from foot to foot to keep warm, a little to the side of the tall, imposing entryway, chatting with one of the helmeted

American guards. She wore a halo of cigarette smoke.

Róza and I recognized her at exactly the same time, for different reasons.

“There’s Engel,” Róza said. “She was one of the lab technicians, the creepiest thing on legs. She was always sneaking around injecting people with morphine. We called her the ‘Angel of Sleep.’ Hah! She wasn’t working in the *Revier* anymore when they did the Bunker operations. Bet she never dreamed the Americans would catch up with her.”

Our bus pulled up. I stared back over my shoulder as I climbed on, in shock. Róza had recognized another Nazi on her personal vendetta list—but I’d seen a ghost. Anna Engel had been the leader of my work crew at Ravensbrück, scheduled to be gassed at the same time as the Rabbits. I’d thought she was dead.

And I admit to *joy* when I realized she was still alive.

People on the bus gave up seats for us. I leaned over Róza to rub a clear patch in the fogged-up window and stared at the girl standing there in her plume of smoke and condensed breath, hugging a thin raincoat around her and listening with a cynical expression to something the GI in the helmet was saying. She handed him her cigarette and it glowed as he put it to his lips, and then they both laughed. And then the bus pulled away.

Anna had been a prisoner herself by the time I knew her—a German prisoner. We’d got along all right. She’d told me she’d been an actual employee at Ravensbrück in 1942, quit her job, and got sent back as a criminal in 1944.

“That was *Anna*!” I exclaimed. “My *Kolonka*! I thought they gassed her!”

“I wish they had,” Róza snarled. “That was the bitch who put me under for the first operation.”

We didn’t say anything to each other on the short bus ride back to the hotel, because I didn’t trust Róza with what I knew.

I knew that Herta Oberheuser was the only woman on trial. I’d done a lot of boning up on what was going on, and I’d talked

with Dr. Alexander. Róza, on the other hand, focused on vengeance, was not paying much attention to the mechanics of the trial.

If Oberheuser was the only woman on trial, any other women involved must be here as witnesses—possibly even as witnesses for the defense. So Anna must be a witness, like Róza herself.

I didn't dare tell her. I'd liked Anna.

Róza sat on the edge of her bed and slowly rolled down her hose the way she had on our first night in Nuremberg. I started to get undressed, too. Róza said suddenly, "Your scars are nasty, Rose. Do they hurt?"

I craned my neck. I'd never actually seen much of my scars, which start on my lower back and go halfway down my thighs.

"They don't hurt, but I got a stupid infection last winter that had to be operated on. I couldn't sit down again for a week. So embarrassing. I'm fine now." I pulled my nightgown on.

"You never make a fuss about anything. You don't even want *revenge*."

I turned around to look at her. She was still sitting there with her stockings around her ankles.

"For my beating? Gosh, I don't even know who did it!" I exclaimed. "I don't want it to happen to anyone *else*, ever again. But how would I get revenge for *that*? They used to bribe other prisoners to do the beatings sometimes, by giving them extra bread! What if they'd held back your rations for two weeks, then given you extra bread to beat me? I wouldn't have blamed you!"

"Holy Mary, you sound just like *Lisette*," she sneered, and I could tell she didn't mean it as a compliment. "*'Faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.'* Forget about revenge! These trials aren't about revenge. They're about *justice*. Don't you want *justice*, Rose Justice?"

For a moment I thought she was going to burst out in her evil cackling laugh at her own stupid pun.

Instead, she started to cry.

I'd only ever seen her cry once before, and that had been a full-fledged tantrum. She always made such a big production out of laughing like a witch that I was unprepared for the simplicity of her despair now. She hardly made a sound or moved, but big, silent crystal tears like Cape May diamonds slid quietly down her cheeks.

"Of course I want justice," I said through my teeth, aching with guilt and loss and the colossal *unfairness* of it all. I buried my face in my hands for a moment.

"Rose, I can't do it," I heard her gasp.

I looked up. "What?" I said. "You can't do what?"

"I can't do the trial. I can't be a witness. I just *can't*."

"Oh, *Różyczka!*"

I sat down beside her and pulled her into my arms because I knew, I *knew* exactly how she felt.

She buried her face in my shoulder and sobbed. I'd never seen her cry like this—not ever.

"I don't want to do it," she sobbed. "I don't want to stand up in front of all those men, all those strangers, barefoot with my skirt pulled up so they can stare at me, and have that dry little man point with his stick and explain it all in words I'll *never* make sense of. I don't want to have to turn around and tell everyone how they did it. It made me cry in the interview, telling about how they stuffed the rags in my mouth in the Bunker so I couldn't scream, and twisted my arms back and held me down while they injected me—how I fought and fought and just woke up to my hips in plaster again with chunks of bone missing *anyway*, only in *prison* this time. They hadn't even washed the mud off my feet—they did the same thing to Vladyslava, but she's so much more sensible than me. I told Dr. Alexander in his office, but I just *can't* tell that hall full of strangers. With that sickening Fischer *listening*. Men *scare* me."

Since she'd been fourteen, all the men in her life had done nothing but hurt her.

"But you're Róża! You're so strong!"

"Yes. That's the other thing. I'm brave and strong and young—and little and pretty. Dr. Alexander wants to show off all that. It'll make people feel sorry for us, wring their hearts,

shock them—”

“As it should!”

“But Rose, I’m not *smart*.”

“*What?*”

Róža, as far as I knew, was pretty fluent in six languages, not counting Ravensbrück Camp patois. She’d memorized every song and poem I’d ever recited after hearing it three times. She knew more about Polish politics than I’d know about anybody’s politics in a lifetime.

“Holy Virgin Mother, I felt so *stupid* watching the others get interviewed. Vladyslava is a teacher and the rest of them are all scientists. They always understand what Dr. Alexander’s talking about, what was done to them. Their brains are crammed with mysterious expertise in bacteria or chemicals—or medicine, like you.”

“Well, you’ve got a translation job!”

“Who told you that? Oh, Lisette.” Róža heaved another desperate sob. “I lied to her about that. You have to have a degree to do that kind of work for the Polish Research Institute. I’m just the girl who makes them coffee and puts the stamps on envelopes. They pay me mostly because they feel sorry for me. It doesn’t matter now anyway, because they’ve run out of funding and I won’t be able to work there when I get back. But I don’t even have a high school diploma—”

“So get one!”

“I can’t, Rose, I *can’t*.” She burst into fresh tears. “I *tried*. I tried to take an exam and I *can’t do it*, and that’s how I *know* I can’t do the trial tomorrow. I *dread* it all happening again. I was going to start with mathematics, because I’m good at it and it’s neutral and I could do it in Swedish, and all I did was sit there for an hour *cringing* while the proctor walked up and down between the candidates, making sure they weren’t cheating. Every time she passed me, I ducked. I kept expecting her to hit me. And finally, just to prove to myself that I could do anything I wanted and she *wouldn’t* hit me, I crunched up the test paper and threw my pencils on the floor and walked out. Then I sat in the toilets and cried until the exam was over.”

It was almost exactly what had happened to me, when I’d

tried to read my poems aloud to an audience. I knew *exactly* how she felt.

Róza sniffed, wiping her eyes on her sleeves.

"I *know* I'll do the same thing tomorrow. It'll be *worse* tomorrow. Vladyslava and Maria were operated on in the Bunker just like I was, but they can talk about it and I can't. They'll answer the questions so calmly and precisely, and I'll just burst into tears or start screaming at Fischer again—"

"Well, that could be impressive, too, you know."

"I'm not going to do it, Rose. They've got four smart, educated grown-ups to show off, and they don't need my testimony and I'm not going to do it."

I held on to her tightly while she calmed down a little.

"Will you tell Dr. Alexander for me?" she begged.

I could see why she didn't want to do *that* herself.

The wily Ravensbrück prisoner in me rose to the surface.

"I'll tell him for you," I agreed. "But only if you sit with me and watch the trial."

"You bitch," she snapped automatically, and I was so *relieved* to hear her being nasty. But she didn't act like she was mad at me. She hugged me tightly around the waist, snuggling all her weight against me.

She was so much heavier than I expected. No lift balancing her life at *all*.

3. DRAG

Dr. Alexander took it very well, considering how early it was and that I had to interrupt him in his office right before the session started so I could catch him privately, and this was the last day before the Christmas recess. He is such a kind man.

“I’m not surprised,” he admitted. “I thought *someone* might back out, and I’m glad it’s Róza. She’s a volatile witness. She’s different from the others.”

“Different how?”

“She isn’t *finished*. She has no sense of who she is. The others knew that before the war started—but how old was Róza when she went to prison, fourteen? Fifteen when she underwent the first experiment? She grew up in Ravensbrück. In a way, she’s still there.”

I knew exactly what he meant. There wasn’t any part of Róza that wasn’t connected to Ravensbrück, even her work, even the parts of her body that had escaped experimentation—she hadn’t started her period until she was eighteen, after the war was over.

It is true that Ravensbrück shaped me—whatever I would have been without it interfering, I am someone else now. On the simplest level, I don’t think I would be in Scotland or in medicine. But Ravensbrück doesn’t *define* me. I had a lot of being Rose to cling to when I landed there—I was a pilot, I was a poet, I was a Girl Scout, I was part of a family, I was the captain of the Mount Jericho High School County Champion Girls’ Varsity Basketball Team, and I still bore traces of all these things even in the concentration camp. I wore my Air Transport Auxiliary USA patch on my shoulder and identified the aircraft that flew overhead, so we could guess at how the Americans or the Soviets were advancing. I was given jobs only tall girls could do; I taught my companions Scout songs and learned theirs; I produced more poetry in six months than I’d ever produced in my life, most of it in my head. And I was part of a family—Lisette, Irina, Karolina, Róza.

Róza was part of my family. But her own real family had all been killed before she’d even arrived at Ravensbrück. I’d

known mine was safe. That made a difference, too. Róža's Camp Family was her *only* family.

When I told anyone at the Camp who I was, I'd say, "I'm Rose Justice. I'm a pilot."

When Róža first told me who she was, she'd said, "I'm Polish Political Prisoner 7705. I'm a Rabbit."

When you're flying, the changing balance of lift and weight pulls you up or down. But another pair of forces pulls you forward or backward through the air: thrust and drag. *Thrust* is the power that pulls the kite forward—you run with it to get it up in the air. You have to have thrust to create lift. *Drag* is there because your kite's surfaces push against the air and slow the kite down. Drag doesn't pull you out of the sky; it makes you fly more slowly.

For the most part, Room 600 in the Palace of Justice, the Doctors' Trial courtroom, looked just like you'd imagine any courtroom—actually, it looked spanking new, with its wood panels gleaming with varnish and modern lighting installed in the ceiling. That was all done last year just before the IMT, the International Military Tribunal. The four American judges were all wearing new robes flown there specially from Washington, DC. But the outstanding feature of the courtroom was that it was entirely snarled in telephone and electronic cables for the simultaneous translations, everybody caught in a huge black spiderweb. *Everyone* was connected by this web—defendants, witnesses, lawyers, judges, observers, reporters, and of course, the panel of translators themselves—*everybody* had his or her head plugged into this amazing machine. You could tell right away who'd been here before and who was here for the first time by their nonchalant or inept use of the headphones.

Talk about drag! You were so *dependent*. Also, it was easy to see why people just stopped listening when Madame Vaillant-Couturier was telling them about the gas chambers at Auschwitz. It was like turning off the radio. You can't bear to listen? Just pull the headphones off.

Róža, who understands English and Polish and German, didn't need headphones.

We sat in the gallery to watch, just in front of one of the film crews. We were surrounded by an intense crowd of German medical students my age who were frantically taking notes. Róza perched ramrod straight on the edge of her seat. She gripped the sides of her chair. I don't know what she was thinking, but she looked like a Fury. Her face was set in a sneer and her eyes were burning. She didn't watch her friends giving evidence; her gaze was locked on the defendants, the twenty-two Nazi men and one woman.

Dr. Alexander's evidence and his questioning of the Rabbits took the entire day, and no one else dared question them. The presiding judge, Walter B. Beals, would ask if the defense wanted to cross-examine a witness, and there would be flat silence. One of Jadviga's scars had been inflamed that whole week and she stood there anyway, *still* in pain, telling about how they tied her down in the Bunker.

How you *knew* they were going to operate on you because the first thing they did was shave your legs.

Telling how Fischer had smoked cigarettes between operations without bothering to change his gloves.

How Oberheuser would make the girls stand in line, hopping on one uninjured leg, to get the filthy bandages changed on the other leg, and then instead of changing them, she'd tell them to come back the next day.

How sometimes, if you fought, they'd blindfold you for the operation, or wrap your head in a blanket.

About the woman guard who'd said, "They must be made to *suffer* before they're executed."

Fischer wouldn't look at Jadviga. He couldn't look at any of them. He'd done most of the operations himself, under Gebhardt's instruction.

By the time little Maria finished her testimony at the end of the day, it sounded like there wasn't anyone breathing anywhere in the crowded, wire-webbed room. Maria is only a couple of years older than me. She'd had muscle peeled away from her leg right down to the bone—half her leg was gone. She looked very vulnerable up on the raised platform with her back to the court, in a stylish new dress but holding her skirt

bunched up around her thighs, barefoot, barelegged. Dr. Alexander did a juggling act with his notes and his microphone while he pointed out how they'd torn apart her leg, but all I could do was stare at the tendrils of hair curling at the nape of Maria's bare neck, escaping from where her hair was elegantly pinned up.

No wonder Róža's backed out of this, was all I could think. Next to me, Róža didn't stop gripping the sides of her chair.

I followed her gaze to the defendants, tied up in their telephone wires. Only Fischer looked remotely unhappy, his forehead resting against his fist. The others just sat staring straight ahead as though they were made of stone.

Then I looked around the room below us. There really weren't very many women at all, and when I found one in the crowd I'd stare at her for a moment, wondering who she was—someone's secretary? A German doctor's wife? A reporter or photographer?

In front of us, a girl with straight dark hair clipped back in a flat ponytail with a metal barrette was looking back at me—waiting for me to meet her cool green gaze. Hers was the only face turned toward the gallery and not toward the witness stand. It was Anna.

She'd seen me and remembered me. She didn't smile—it would have been weird for anyone to be smiling at that point, even in greeting. She gave me a brief, curt nod.

I nodded back.

She hesitated a moment. Then she rubbed her hands together deliberately, turning her palms over each other and rubbing the backs of her knuckles, briefly miming washing her hands. Just for a second. I knew exactly what she meant.

Meet me in the washroom.

When the day's session was over, the last session before the Christmas recess, we gathered in one of the vast ornate lobbies shaking hands with people and congratulating Dr. Alexander on his moving presentation. Vladyslava and Jadviga and Maria and the other Maria got their photographs taken. Some of the

photographers wanted to include me and Róza, too. I refused because I wasn't a Rabbit. When Vladyslava insisted Róza join them, it was the perfect time for me to disappear for a few minutes.

"Powder room," I told Róza. "Back in a minute! You all look beautiful—I hope they slap you on the front page of the *New York Times*!"

Anna was waiting for me, leaning against the sink and smoking—exactly the way I'd left her in the *Revier* in Ravensbrück not quite two years ago.

"*Häftling Einundfünfzigtausendvierhundertachtundneunzig!*" she rapped out—"Prisoner 51498!"

I don't think I've ever been hit so hard by a handful of words.

It was probably the first thing that came into her head when she saw me—an exclamation of surprise, not a command. She usually did call me by my number because she was *supposed* to. But to hear my number barked at me in German like that was more than my brain could react to sensibly. I snapped to attention, head up and staring straight ahead, arms straight at my sides.

There was another woman in the room, an old woman sitting in the corner with a bundle of knitting, who stood up in alarm when I made my dramatic entrance. I realized she was the attendant for the ladies' restroom, and I relaxed and kind of melted against the doorframe, hanging on to it with one shaking hand as though I had missed my footing. The way a cat washes itself when you catch it doing something clumsy, pretending you never saw that.

I recovered myself and startled Anna back by throwing my arms around her. She held the cigarette away and stiffly returned my ridiculously enthusiastic embrace with her other arm.

"Calm down, kid. Sorry! It slipped out—like being slapped in the face, isn't it? Gives you power."

She was still fluent enough in American slang to sound like a gangster. I guess she'd been chatting a lot with the soldiers. The attendant sat down and picked up her knitting again with a

hmph, ignoring us now that we seemed to be friends.

“Oh, *Anna!*” I felt tearful. I’d really thought she was dead. She was playing her part in the trial with complete calm, though, so I tried to keep my voice from shaking, too. “What are you doing here, Anna?”

“I’m a witness. You know what I did at Ravensbrück. I’m a *good* witness because I’ve been on both sides of the fence. But I guess they won’t get to me till after Christmas now—it would spoil the show after those other girls.”

She held out a packet of cigarettes to offer me one—Lucky Strike. *Definitely* she’d been making friends with the American soldiers.

“How long are you here?” she asked casually.

“Just this week. I go home on Sunday.”

“To Pennsylvania?”

“No, I live in Scotland. I’m in my second year at the University of Edinburgh.”

“Studying what?”

“Medicine.”

Anna smiled and sighed. “Well, good for you, Rose,” she said. “Except for these trials, I’m not really going anywhere with my life. I guess you noticed the guards.” She nodded at the attendant. “I’m a witness here in Nuremberg, but at the Ravensbrück trial in Hamburg, I’ll be one of the accused. The Americans are just borrowing me here. When they’re done with me, I get handed into the custody of the English.”

“*Anna!*” I exclaimed. “What are you accused of?”

“Angel of Sleep, remember? Anesthetizing those kids before their terrible operations? And I knew what I was doing, too. I *knew*. I didn’t have to do it. I made a lot of choices—good, bad, bad, good.”

She struck a match and held it out to me. I leaned in to light my cigarette, then stood up straight and took a deep breath.

“What will happen to you?” I asked.

She let out a puff of smoke before she answered. Finally, she said slowly, “I’m not a murderer, but...you never know.

This new ‘crimes against humanity’ covers a lot of ground. And the British are running the Ravensbrück trial. Four of their special agents were murdered at Ravensbrück—you know, the spies everybody called the parachutists. Some of the British prosecution team is here now, interviewing the Ravensbrück defendants.” She gave me a curious look. “Aren’t you involved in the Ravensbrück trial, too?”

I shook my head.

Anna shrugged. “Well, I’m expecting about ten years in prison. It’ll be interesting to see what Oberheuser gets. She was a witness at the International Military Tribunal before being put on trial here, so I feel like we have a lot in common.”

“I guess it’d be good for you if she got acquitted.”

Anna laughed bitterly. “I damn well hope she doesn’t get acquitted! Evil bitch.” She took a long drag on her cigarette. “Nice to share with you, Rose. Seems a little strange.”

Words cannot describe how strange it seemed. I just said, “I know. I have the same feeling eating dinner with Róza.”

“She’s one of the Rabbits? Which one?”

“The one who looks like a little china doll. The one who didn’t testify.”

“You were pretty lucky to have the Rabbits taking care of you at Ravensbrück, you know.”

“I know it,” I said with my teeth clenched together, because I was in danger of bursting into tears if I tried to talk normally. “My whole transport was gassed. The Rabbits hid me.”

“Oh—” Anna closed her eyes. “What, all the French girls on our work crew?” She was silent for a moment. “God. Those poor kids.”

When she opened her eyes again I tried to shrug offhandedly, the way she had about going to prison, and couldn’t do it. I looked away, blinking. The attendant was knitting peacefully, oblivious to the intense conversation we were having—I suddenly realized that of course we were speaking English, so she probably couldn’t understand us anyway.

“How’d you get out, Anna?” I asked.

"I swapped my number for a dead woman's—a Jehovah's Witness. Lavender triangle, nobody ever pesters them. And I just kept moving from block to block. No one tries to count you when they think you're dead! I was still there when the Russians turned up. I walked back to Berlin." Anna let out a long, smoke-filled breath. I don't think I'll ever be able to picture her *anywhere* but leaning against a porcelain washbasin and smoking.

"Must be nice to be back in school," she went on. "I spent a year struggling to feed my miserable mother and my grandmother in one room, with no heat, and then the Yanks arrested me. It was kind of a relief. Mama's having to pull her own weight now, and it's about time, too. Poor Mama." Another long drag. "Everybody got raped when the Soviets took Germany. *Everybody*. I turned up in Berlin not long after they got there, and Mama had stopped going out. She was letting her mother forage for both of them—this seventy-three-year-old woman out on the streets in the rubble, selling herself to Russian soldiers in exchange for bread. *Gott im Himmel*." Anna took a deep, shaking breath. "Makes Ravensbrück look civilized. I put a stop to that. Found work for Mama, too, a good office job, work *I* should have taken, keeping accounts for a small building company that's been taken over by the Soviets. I guess she's all right now because she sends me packages."

"My gosh, Anna."

"I wonder what those American judges *think*," Anna said fiercely. "What are they *thinking* when those girls get up and tell them about what happened to them? The soldier boys are okay. They've seen things. They have some idea. But sometimes I really feel like everything is so *fucking* unfair. What gives those old men the right to guess what I've seen—what I've had to do? The right to judge me?"

She stubbed out her cigarette in the sink. The attendant sighed, tutted, and put down her knitting. She heaved herself to her feet again and pushed the ashtray that was sitting on the little dressing table right next to Anna a little closer to her, then turned on the tap and swooshed out the sink. Anna lit another cigarette.

"How'd you make your mother go to work, when she was

too scared to leave the house?" I asked.

"Forced her," Anna said. "I mean, I really forced her. Pulled her out the door, pushed her down the stairs. I'm a *Kolonka*—green triangle, red armband. I know how to bully people, remember?" She laughed bitterly. "Every morning for a month, till she started coming along without a fight. I fought her and fought *for* her, too. I wouldn't let anyone touch her. She's better now—she made friends with the woman who runs the canteen where she works, and they visit each other—you know, play cards, darn socks, gossip about their terrible daughters. She gets up and eats every day. And you *have* to, you know? You can't just sit in a corner weeping or you'll *die*."

She looked over at me suddenly. "You *know*, Rose. You've seen people do it. You've seen what happens."

I have seen it.

"I don't know...." Anna shook her head. "Maybe I did the wrong thing. Maybe I was too hard on her. But I had to do something. I had to get her going."

"Anna—is there anything I can send you? Anything I can *do* for you?"

"Well..." Her face hardened in its cynical frown. "Bah. Bribe the judges?" Then she smiled a little, hesitantly, like it was something she wasn't used to doing. "Look, if I ever get out of prison, and we're ever in the same place at the same time again, I wish you'd take me flying."

I stubbed out my own cigarette in the ashtray and held out my hand. She took it.

"*Deal*," I said forcefully. "Scout's honor. I will take you flying."

"I am looking forward to it already," Anna said warmly.

4. THRUST

There's got to be power somewhere. The engine has to turn the propeller, and something has to start the engine. Someone has to lift the kite, maybe run with it. A bird has to beat its wings. Things don't magically take off and fly just because it's a little windy.

I spent twenty minutes on the telephone at the reception desk in the hotel, driving everybody crazy because I had to make someone translate for me whenever an operator came on. But I finally got through to the Operations hut at the temporary European Air Transport airfield where I'd landed nearly a week ago. I knew they were doing supply runs all the time, keeping Nuremberg stocked for the lawyers and soldiers and newspapermen.

"Yes, I know they're not supposed to take me back to Paris till Monday, but is anyone going anywhere tomorrow? *Anywhere?* Taking reconnaissance pictures or something? I just wanted to come along for the flight. We don't need to land—"

"Let me put you on the line with a pilot, honey," the disembodied gum-cracking American voice said kindly. "You're Roger Justice's niece, right? Yeah, we heard all about you. How's the trial going?" She laughed. Fortunately she didn't give me time to try to answer—I think she was just being polite and didn't really want to know. "I got somebody here you can talk to—"

"Hello?"

She'd handed the phone over. The voice was gruff.

"Can't get enough of joyriding in the C-47s, huh?"

It was Chuck Brewster, who'd flown the plane from Paris. I'd told him my story about buzzing the Eiffel Tower on VE Day and I'm not sure he believed me—I'm *sure* he didn't believe I'd been flying longer than he had, which is also true. He was a serious guy—neither one of us suggested he let me take over the controls for the fun of it—but we got along all right.

"Well, you're in luck, Miss Justice, because I'm doing a run down to Ronchi dei Legionari in Italy tomorrow morning to

pick up Christmas dinner for this outfit.”

I laughed. “*Christmas dinner?*”

“Yep, a couple hundred frozen turkeys straight from a farm in Connecticut, plus—would you believe it?—a dozen Christmas trees and all the trimmings, waiting at the docks at Monfalcone for the GIs camping out here over the holidays. You can come along if you want—it’s about an hour and a half down, another hour and a half back. Plus a few hours there while they load her up. You can go to the beach!”

“You’re kidding.”

“Nah, I’m serious! We’ll get someone to run you to the beach while we pack up. Right on the Adriatic Sea.”

For a moment I couldn’t talk—I could hardly breathe.

In my head I heard the voice of my murdered friend Karolina, whispering an impossible fantasy in my ear as we lay clutching each other for warmth on the filthy wooden bunks of Ravensbrück: *Let’s go to the beach on the beautiful Adriatic Sea.*

“Hello? Hello?” came Chuck’s voice. “You still there, Miss Justice? Bet you weren’t expecting to spend the first day of winter on the Adriatic, were you?”

I let out my breath in a gasp. I didn’t cry.

Instead, I asked brazenly, “Can I bring a friend?”

I shamed Róża into coming with me to the airfield.

“You know the story I used to tell about how my boyfriend Nick was going to come and rescue us in a little plane—he’d land in the middle of the *Lagerstrasse* and we’d all fly away to the beach? You and I are going to fly to the beach today.”

“It’s December!”

“Okay, no red bathing suits this time. That’ll have to wait till I can take you to the Conewago Grove Lake. Anyway, it doesn’t matter. We have to do it for *Karolina*.”

I was brutal. I didn’t hit Róża. I didn’t touch her. But I was brutal.

“Karolina was gassed instead of me—she took my place, she took my number, but she didn’t do it for me, Różyczka, and

you know it. She did it for *you*. She did it so I could get you out of Ravensbrück and you could tell the world what they did to you—what they did to *Karolina*. She wasn't as permanently damaged as you, but she still got a paper cone full of bacteria sewn into her leg and ended up so swollen with infection she couldn't walk for eight months—”

Róża was clenching her fists.

“I *know* what they did to Karolina,” I went on mercilessly. “I know exactly what they did to every single one of the Rabbits. It's all been recorded by the people you work for, and maybe you haven't read the specific reports, but I have, because they're all part of Dr. Alexander's evidence. Karolina could have told the world herself. She'd be making newsreels about it—people would be using her work as evidence, too! She could have left me to be gassed with the rest of my transport, and she'd have stood up there in front of that tribunal and *showed* everybody what happened. But *you didn't*. And I'm not blaming you for that, but you are darned well flying to the beach with me. Because Karolina was going to and she's dead and you're coming along in her place.”

By the time I'd finished, Róża was crouched in a heap on the floor of our room, bent over her knees with her face in her hands. All I could see of her were her round shoulders in their sensible gray wool and the short, fluffy waves of caramel-gold perm. But she wasn't crying; her shoulders weren't shaking. She was thinking.

After a few seconds, when she was pretty sure I'd finished, she sat up and looked me in the eye.

“The Ravensbrück trial in Hamburg's not over yet,” she said. “Tell the world yourself, Rose Justice! I know, you've got all these poems published and you're doing a story for your magazine, big damn deal. You sit in your room all alone at your typewriter, with no one watching if it makes you cry, and you take it to the post office and no one even knows what you're sending. How hard is that to do? *I* could do that. I've *done* that. My written testimony is part of the Lund files, too, you know. *NO*. If you want me to go flying with you for *Karolina*, you will damn well go to *Hamburg* for Karolina.”

It was my turn to feel like I'd been punched in the stomach,

and she saw it in my face. Róza let out one of her familiar, maniacal cackles. “You won’t even have to take your clothes off!”

“I’ve already said no,” I said faintly.

“Bah. Bribe the judges.”

Which is exactly what Anna had said.

And suddenly it became like so many decisions I’d made during the war; *I didn’t have a choice*. I had to do it whether or not I wanted to. Not just for Karolina, who was dead, but also for Anna, who was still alive and had no one to defend her.

You only fly straight and level in *balance*.

Anna and Róza are the opposing forces that perfectly balance each other to keep me in the air.

It was harder to get the words out this time than the easy promise I’d made to Anna in the washroom in the Palace of Justice.

“You’ve got a deal,” I gasped.

Róza and I got up at the crack of dawn and shared a car with a couple of BBC reporters who were heading out that day with a lot of equipment. They wouldn’t let us help them carry anything, and one of them actually went out of his way to take Róza’s arm and help her across the churned slush to the makeshift Operations building at the airfield, which meant he had to do two trips—but sometimes you have to just give up being independent and graciously accept the kindness that’s offered you. And anyway, this was without a doubt the sorriest excuse for an airfield I have ever seen, even counting the one they knocked up at Camp LA right after Reims was liberated. I guess that is our own fault for bombing Nuremberg’s real airfield to smithereens.

I’m painting a scene of gloom, but in fact it was a glorious, *glorious* day—crystal clear and breezy. There had been another inch or so of snow overnight, so folks were frantically clearing a very narrow path up the runway. Chuck produced flight suits for us, which for some reason made Róza laugh her head off—her real laugh, which I’d hardly ever heard in all the time I’d

known her, bubbly as champagne. “Are we going to go skiing?” she asked.

“Why skiing?”

“My mother used to put me in this awful snowsuit—baggy legs just like this, four sizes too big for me, and it was *purple*. She’d roll up the legs and hold them in place with rubber bands.”

I’d never heard her talk about her mother, either.

There weren’t any passenger seats in the plane—just benches along one side and plenty of room for cargo. Róza clutched my hand as we approached the plane. Dakotas are *big*.

“Don’t worry!” I told her. “It’s like getting in a bus. You’ve never flown in daylight, but it really is beautiful in the air. If you close your eyes while we’re taking off—” I stopped abruptly, remembering Polly’s reaction to the same words.

“I’m not a *baby*,” Róza snapped, holding her head up, her china-doll cheeks rosy with the brisk December wind. “I said I’d do it and I’m doing it with my eyes open. Are you going to close your eyes in Hamburg?”

“You really are the world’s worst pain in the neck,” I complained. But my heart *ached* for her bravery.

I hadn’t actually thought about our route when I’d set up the trip. I’d thought we’d see a lot of bomb-damaged cities—I’d seen *so much* bomb damage from the air. I’d wondered, briefly, when I first got the idea of taking Róza flying, if I could find someone who’d fly us over Ravensbrück. After I’d hung up talking to Chuck the night before, I’d had to go hide in the ladies’ powder room and sob for a while. Oh, *Karolina*.

But I hadn’t actually realized that this flight was going to give both me and Róza our first sight of the Alps.

The first part of the trip was mostly just snowy field and forest, gleaming swaths of white and increasingly huge tracts of black-green pine. Then, as we made our way farther south, the landscape grew rockier and steeper and we could see the crags of the Austrian Alps climbing ahead of us. They don’t pressurize the C-47s, and they didn’t have oxygen hooked up in the back, so the highest we flew was about 10,000 feet. That meant that there were moments when we were flying *between* mountain

peaks. Grossglockner, Austria's highest mountain, was blinding in the midwinter's day sunlight, glittering white and gold and rising two thousand feet higher than we were flying. It was like flying over another planet—over another world, Oz or Wonderland or the moon.

Honestly—there were moments, many of them, when we were between peaks, with snowbound crags and rock all around us, when Róza really *was* so enchanted that she forgot to be scared. We were surrounded, as far as we could see, by our world's sheer unspoiled *majesty*. It was unspeakably, indescribably beautiful. It wasn't even barren. We could see glimpses of valleys and farms; there far below a touch of green where it hadn't snowed yet; there a river; there a fairy-tale village.

We were both pressed to the windows on opposite sides of the empty cargo plane.

"Did you *know*?" Róza gasped. "Did you *know* it would look like this?"

"I didn't even think about it! We just got lucky!"

"Even without the beach it is worth it. I won't mind so much getting work sewing on laundry tags if I remind myself about *this*."

I wasn't sure how to respond to that dribble of self-pity.

I asked cautiously, "Róza, what are you doing for Christmas?"

"There's a party at the Institute. It was fun last year—Poles and Swedes all mixed up. I don't know how much fun it'll be this year, though, since the funding is finished and nobody has work in 1947."

"Do you actually have a real possibility of spending the next few years sewing on laundry tags?"

"No. I haven't looked for that job yet."

"For the love of Pete."

No wonder she seemed so beaten.

"What are you doing for Christmas, Rose?" she asked. "Are you going to Pennsylvania?"

"How could I? It takes a week. I'd be on the boat on

Christmas Day!”

Róza gave one of her raucous hoots of laughter. “*Fly*. Did you go last year?”

“No, I had an *awful* Christmas with my aunt Edie and Uncle Roger in England. I did nothing but cry all Christmas Day. It was worse than the year before. All of you were *gone*. And the next day, the twenty-sixth, they have this big annual party and there were about a hundred people in the house, and I just felt like a freak. So this year—”

Throughout this entire conversation we’d had our backs turned to each other, standing on opposite sides of the bowels of the plane, glued to the small windows. There was frost on the rivets and the gray ribs of the plane’s interior walls. But outside, it was fairyland.

I said, “Róza, come back to Scotland with me on Monday. I’m going to stay with my friend Maddie for a week with her husband’s family. Maddie *told* me to bring my friends. I know I promised you the Hotel Hershey, but I swear that Craig Castle will be *just as nice*.”

“Oh, how could I?”

“Easy! The place is always full of orphans and soldiers with missing arms—they won’t notice you. I mean—”

She giggled evilly. “The soldiers will, I bet.”

“Yes, they definitely *will*, but I meant that one more—”

“One more crippled orphan.”

“Oh, STOP. You know what I mean.” I drew a shaking breath. “And anyway, we are in the same family. That won’t change.”

Ahead of us, as the mountains dropped away, the black-green forest gave way to duller and brighter green ahead. The Italian fields were tiny and patchwork—you could *tell* you were in another country. Far, far away on the horizon was an astonishing stripe of sapphire that we knew, but couldn’t quite believe, must be the Adriatic Sea.

“There is a medical school at the University of Edinburgh that they teach entirely in Polish,” I said. “They started it in the middle of the war. I could take you to meet my tutor and we

could ask about it. You could do your high school exams in Edinburgh and maybe try the university course next fall—”

“We could share an apartment?”

“Of course! And Róża—” I choked a little, because it felt like we were making up another rescue fantasy. It felt like we couldn’t *possibly* be planning something that would really happen. “Róża, we can *write our book*.”

And honestly, why not?

Why not? We were free and independent. We were *grown-ups*. Even if she wasn’t working to begin with, little Różyczka wouldn’t be very expensive to feed. We might need more space than my bed-sitting-room offered. But not much. We wouldn’t need much. We’d shared a lot less.

Now she didn’t even say anything. She just came over to share my window with me and took my hand and squeezed it hard. And I knew it wasn’t just another Nick Story, another impossible rescue fantasy. We were really going to do it. She’d come with me to Scotland on Monday.

She’d probably come with me to Hamburg in January.

We could see the coast as we landed, green flat fields arching lazily toward Yugoslavia, the docks of Monfalcone crowded with US Navy ships, the narrow strip of sand at the edge of the marsh across the bay. That was where we were going. It wasn’t a resort—it wasn’t Lido. But it was a beach on the Adriatic. It really was.

Róża let go of my hand as we landed. She watched out the window, unflinching, the whole way down. She’d made up her mind she wasn’t scared. I could believe she’d delivered plastic explosive for the Polish Resistance on her bicycle when she was in ninth grade. I could believe she’d told the SS Camp Commander she’d rather be executed than be experimented on again.

She climbed out of the plane without letting anybody help her.

Ronchi dei Legionari wasn’t exactly tropical. That part of the Adriatic Sea is actually the most northern coast of anything connected to the Mediterranean. You can still see the Alps, blue in the near distance. The sun was shining, but the stiff breeze

was chilly. It smelled like the ocean. It felt like spring.

I caught my breath in panic all of a sudden. If only we had something to *do*, I thought. I don't want to stand on a strange beach feeling blue about Karolina. We need sand pails and shovels to distract us. Something to collect shells in. Fishing nets—

Róza turned to me and said, “Remember Irina’s paper planes? Remember the *glider*? My sister and I used to make kites out of newspaper. You think they’d let us have some paper and string?”

They did better than that. They gave us silk maps. The airfield had been a matériel supply depot since Italy’s surrender to the Allies in 1943, and among other things they still had a big box of unused aircrew escape maps of all of southern Europe sitting in a corner of their radio room. Everybody on the airfield got involved—actually, I think everyone fell a little in love with Róza, swamped in her enormous flight suit with its rolled-up cuffs, with her fluffy caramel hair shining in the dusty sunlight streaming through windows still crossed with peeling tape so they wouldn’t shatter in an air raid. Someone found a reel of fishing line and balsam strips to make a frame with. Another gum-cracking receptionist cut us a strip of the silver tinsel Christmas garland she’d draped around the door for us to use as a tail. She made us pose with her for a snapshot.

“You gals are nuts,” she said approvingly. “Gosh, I wish I could come with you. It’s mighty boring sitting here waiting for phone calls and watching the planes come and go. I don’t speak Italian, so I’m too scared to go out by myself when I’m done—gotta wait for one of the boys to come along and escort me! Have fun!”

Sitting in the back of an American military jeep next to Róza, as one of the mechanics drove us along a muddy track through a pine swamp and we struggled to keep our silk kite from taking off on its own before we got anywhere, I felt very smug and lucky.

It is nice to feel that way.

“What does *nuts* mean?”

“She meant we’re crazy.”

“We are.”

We’d walked right up to the water’s edge, knee-high rippling waves that were a color I’d never imagined—an opaque, pale green, like mint sugar wafers. You could see the big steamers and Navy ships across the bay, the way you could from the little village of Hamble, just outside Southampton, where I’d been stationed when I was an ATA pilot. The sky was a pure, piercing blue, utterly without any cloud in it anywhere.

“Remember the sky at Ravensbrück?” Róža said.

“Yes, *always* beautiful, even when it was snowing.”

“Remember the sunset the night you and Karolina spilled half a drum of soup on the kitchen steps?”

“Oh, I wrote a poem about that—clouds like flaming rubies and fireworks, and all of us sobbing over the horrible soup. The *irony*! What about the shooting stars that night in November, in the early morning roll call!”

“The Leonids!” Róža remembered. “And what about the *rainbow*? The full double rainbow? Lisette started to cry!”

“I *longed* to be in the sky,” I said. “When it was windy like this, I just watched the clouds or leaves or birds racing overhead and I *longed* to be up there with them. It *hurt*.”

“Here we are,” she answered softly. “Free in the wind!”

Suddenly she launched into my kite poem.

“Hope has no feathers.

Hope takes flight

Tethered with twine

like a tattered kite,

slave to the wind’s

capricious drift,

eager to soar

but needing lift.”

I stared at the brilliant sky, listening to Róža softly

chanting my own words.

“Hope waits stubbornly,
watching the sky
for turmoil, feeding on
things that fly:
crows, ashes, newspapers,
dry leaves in flight
all suggest wind
that could lift a kite.”

She paused. The first thing I’d ever said to her was to recite a poem, so after a moment I finished this one for her, softly.

“Hope sails and plunges,
firmly caught
at the end of her string—
fallen slack, pulling taut,
ragged and featherless.
Hope never flies
but doggedly watches
for windy skies.”

She was quiet then. The last verse isn’t really very hopeful. Poor ragged kite, always waiting for a wind that never comes.

Finally Róza took a deep breath.

“It’s windy now,” she said.

She put down her walking stick to take the spool of fishing line. She played out about six feet and let go. The wind was fierce and steady, and the kite lifted like a bird. We both stared up at it, and it was like looking at a landscape from the air, the silk map bright with green and yellow and brown and blue. The tinsel tail snapped and flashed blindingly. After a second our beautiful improvised kite did exactly what the one does in the poem and plunged earthward—I grabbed it by the fragile frame

before it nose-dived into the sand.

“It needs thrust,” I said. “You have to run with it. Can you run?”

She gave me a dirty look. Then she broke into the bubbly champagne laugh. She turned and ran, limping but steady. She laughed over her shoulder, letting out line as I held the kite above my head.

“Run with me, Rose,” she cried.

—by *Rose Justice*

Craig Castle, Castle Craig

December 31, 1946

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AFTERWORD

DECLARATION OF CAUSES

Primo Levi, the author of possibly the most moving descriptions of Auschwitz in print, felt that the true witnesses to the atrocities of the concentration camps were the dead. Survivors like himself, he felt, could give only partial testimony. Memories become fixed or simplified or distorted as they are told over and over, making living testimony inaccurate. This was one of the themes we discussed at length at the Eighth European Summer School at Ravensbrück in August 2012—how memory itself is a construction, particularly as it becomes more and more distanced in time from actual events.

Rose's testimony is even further removed because I made it up. In Rose's story, I have constructed an imitation of a survivor's account. It has become a false memory of my own—Rose's dream of the icy wind in the empty bunks is *my* dream, the single vivid nightmare I had while sleeping in the former SS barracks at Ravensbrück during the week I spent at the summer school. My book is fiction, but it is based on the real memories of other people. In the end, like Rose, I am doing what I can to carry out the last instruction of the true witnesses—those who went to their death crying out: *Tell the world*.

What I'd really like to pound into the reader's head, if there's any lesson to be learned here, is that I didn't make up *Ravensbrück*. I didn't make up *anything* about Ravensbrück. Often, I have had to fill in the blanks—when the toilets stopped working, how thick the mattresses were, how you might improvise a sanitary pad. The *little* things. The terrible and the unbelievable, the gas chambers and the medical experiments and the twenty-five lashes, propping up the dead to make the roll call count come out right, the filth and the dog bites and the curl hunts and the administration and politics of bowls, *I did not make up*. It was real. *It really happened to 150,000 women*. And that is just one camp.

I did simplify some things in order to keep the pace going. I

kept the Rabbits in Block 32 for the whole story, when technically they got moved into different blocks a couple of times during the winter of 1945. I left out the fact that between being selected and being gassed, prisoners got taken to another camp, about a mile away, where they were locked in unheated barracks without food or blankets and left to starve or freeze to death to make it easier on the limited capacity of Ravensbrück's makeshift gas chamber. I didn't explain that the female "SS guards" were technically auxiliary to the SS, which was all male. I didn't translate every one of Rose's conversations into three different languages before she could understand it.

In the preface to his book on Ravensbrück, Jack Morrison points out that it would have been impossible for a single prisoner to have as broad a view of the camp as the researcher who tries to look at all aspects of its six-year operational history. Rose's experience is limited from September 1944 to March 1945, which means that within the confines of *my* book, it's impossible to describe much of what went on before or after these dates. Also, Rose's experience is limited to an extremely closed circle of prisoners and their restricted movements—she never gets inside the textile factories or the kitchens, or is sent on coal-picking duty or unloads barges by the lake. She doesn't interact with children or Gypsies or Jehovah's Witnesses or the men's camp, all of which have their own moving stories of oppression and rebellion. Rose doesn't work in the prisoner-organized maternity ward, a story of miracle and heartbreak. After June 1943 and until the Auschwitz evacuees turned up in late 1944, there were very few Jewish women at Ravensbrück, and they were confined to a single block; their stories are also different. There is a lot more out there than the limited window on Ravensbrück that Rose's experience provides...just so you know.

Each of my main characters is inspired in part by real people, but they are original characters. There's no Róża Czajkowska or Karolina Salska on the actual list of Rabbits' names. However, Dr. Leo Alexander, Marie Claude Vaillant-Couturier, and the four Polish women who gave evidence at the Doctors' Trial—Maria Broel-Plater, Jadwiga Dzido, Władysława Karolewska, and Maria Kuśmierczuk—were all real. The doctors Fritz Fischer, Karl Gebhardt, and Herta Oberheuser were real,

and so was Ravensbrück's commander in 1945, Fritz Suhren. (Rose only ever refers to him as "the stinking Commander.") Most of Ravensbrück's copious documentation was purposefully destroyed before the Soviet Army freed the camp, so the bulk of research on Ravensbrück comes from witness and survivor accounts.

Rose's mnemonic counting-out rhyme includes all the given names of the seventy-four Polish women experimented on in Ravensbrück. (The spelling of their names has been simplified for English-speaking readers.) Some of the women had similar first names or shared a name—in the poem each name is listed only once. The real names of these seventy-four women experimented on are printed in the background of the opening pages of this book.

Writing out Rose's handwriting sample made me cry. It was the first time I had ever really *thought* about the Declaration of Independence and what it means to say that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are unalienable rights. *Tell the world.* I have tried.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editorial teams behind *Rose Under Fire* were much more actively involved in its creation than in any of my previous books. I am deeply and eternally grateful for their focus and enthusiasm. Thank you, Stella Paskins of Egmont UK, Catherine Onder of Disney • Hyperion, and Janice Weaver of Doubleday Canada—and thank you to my agent, Ginger Clark, who was involved in every single editorial discussion.

Obviously it wasn't just Ravensbrück that I researched for this book, and if you check my website at www.elizabethwein.com you'll be able to find discussion of a range of details from aircraft interception to women pilots. I owe thanks to Steve Venus for information on V-1 fuses and prisoner accounts of forced labor in German factories; his website and collection can be viewed at www.bombfuzecollectorsnet.com. Katja Kasri was my German language consultant; her training as a history teacher means that whenever I ask her a question about, say, how to address someone using her prisoner number, she spends a couple of hours trawling newsreel footage and witness testimony to confirm the accuracy of the answer. Tori Tyrrell, Miriam Roberts, and Amanda Banks all read the manuscript at *least* three times and provided me with invaluable reader criticism and encouragement. Katherine Nehring also got tagged at the last minute as a “fresh eye” and provided much-needed annotations on a very tight deadline.

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RAVENSBRÜCK CAMP VOCABULARY

(German unless otherwise noted)

Appelplatz: main roll call square

Aufstehen: stand up, get up

Blockova: (Polish) block leader

Bunker: secure cell block

Fünfundzwanzig: literally “twenty-five.” In the context of Ravensbrück, a standard punishment of twenty-five lashes across the back of the thighs or buttocks.

Häftling: prisoner

Kaninchen: rabbits

Kolonka: (term unique to Ravensbrück) shortened form of *Kolonkova*, forewoman

Králici: (Czech) rabbits

Król: (Polish) a word that means both “rabbit” and “king”

Króliki: (Polish) rabbits

Lagermutter: Camp Mother

Lagerstrasse: main street in Camp

Revier: infirmary

Schmootzich: Rose’s Pennsylvania Dutch interpretation of the German word *Schmuckstücke*, literally “piece of jewelry,” used sarcastically as a noun in the Camp hierarchy to mean a prisoner who’s been reduced to little more than a malnourished and mindless beggar

Schnell: quickly, fast (in the context: “Get moving!”)

Screamer: English translation of a widely used term for roll call siren

SS: abbreviation for *Schutzstaffel*, defense guard

Strafstehen: punishment standing

Verfügbar: a prisoner available for unassigned work detail

Zählappell: roll call

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I have also drawn on accounts from survivors interviewed by Loretta Walz in her documentary film *Die Frauen von Ravensbrück (Women of Ravensbrück)*, 2005.

INTERNET SOURCES

“Voices from Ravensbrück” is part of the digital archives of Lund University in Sweden, and includes transcriptions, some in English, of many of the five hundred survivor interviews collected from 1945 to 1946 by the Polish Research Institute (www.ub.lu.se/collections/digital-collections/voices-from-ravensbr-ck).

The Visual History Archive of the USC Shoah Foundation, to which I was pointed by women’s studies scholar and writer Dr. Andrea Petö of the Central European University in Hungary, provides over a thousand English-language testimonies of Holocaust survivors, including thirty-eight who were imprisoned at Ravensbrück. The site requires user registration and log-in, but it is free (vhaonline.usc.edu).

The Stephen Spielberg Film and Video Archive available on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website contains public-domain footage of Maria Kuśmierczuk and Jadwiga Dzido appearing as witnesses in the Doctors’ Trial in Nuremberg on December 20, 1946, while Dr. Leo Alexander explains, in English, the damage to their legs (resources.ushmm.org/film/display/detail.php?file_num=1961&tape_id=b272053b-eb79-440e-8780-e8b0b6c6364e&clip_id=&media_type=flv).

The Ravensbrück Memorial website (part of the Brandenburg Memorials Foundation) can be visited at www.ravensbrueck.de/mgr/index.html.

There is an excellent teacher’s guide on Ravensbrück produced by the Kennesaw State University Museum of History and Holocaust Education in Georgia, available for download here: www.kennesaw.edu/historymuseum/pdf/tg-ravensbruck.pdf.

These web links were found to be working at the time of this book’s publication.

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Flight Lieutenant James G. Beaufort-Stuart:

The night of 6–7 November 1940—how many of us dead in that raid?

I don't know.

I know nine men in 648 Squadron's A-Flight were killed that night just because of *weather*. Two planes collided in fog just before landing, and one came down heavy with ice. But I don't know how many in A-Flight fell to enemy fire.

How many in B-Flight, then? My own lads . . . I ought to know that, at least.

But I don't. Not offhand. I'd have to sit and count. I probably made a note in my logbook. That night wasn't the first time we took a heavy loss, and it wasn't the last time. *Buckets of blood*. It wasn't as many as last time. Anyway it's hard to remember all the losses, which for Bristol Blenheim bomber crews was just about every mission, and I get some of the dead men muddled when I try to count. The Royal Air Force isn't going to win the war flying Bristol Blenheims.

I'd argued with Wing Commander Talbot Cromwell before we took off on that mission. That wasn't the first time, either. I knew he didn't like me, and I risked an official reprimand, or worse, a demotion, every time I challenged him. We didn't see eye to eye on *anything*.

"We'll never find German warships if we're flying at twenty thousand feet!" I told my commanding officer. I didn't even try to hide my anger. "There's no hope in hell of a Blenheim hitting anything from that height anyway. The bomb doors don't always open when you want them to, and up there you can't tell whether a speck out the window is an enemy destroyer or a bit of runway mud stuck on the Perspex!"

"Are you quite finished, Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart?" said Cromwell, lowering his eyebrows like barrier gates. "You'll fly at twenty thousand feet, and so will all your men. Orders are

orders. That's where Coastal Command wants you to fly. I take my instructions from headquarters and you take yours from me."

Cromwell and I had been at each other since the day we first came together about two weeks earlier.

He got transferred to us in October when we moved to Shetland as the Battle of Britain came to an end. Our squadron patrolled the North Sea for the Royal Air Force, the RAF, just as we'd done at other bases all through the summer of 1940. But Cromwell's role with 648 Squadron was new. Before he got lumbered with us, he'd commanded a squadron of speedy new Spitfire fighters. In August and September, while we were flying Blenheims under cover of cloud on low-level bombing raids targeting German ships, he'd been sending fighter pilots into soaring dogfights in the sun.

None of our experiences matched up. He couldn't manage twin engines and didn't join us when we flew. And he didn't like it that at nineteen years old I was half his age, shorter and slighter than most of the other lads and barely needing a shave, yet I talked back. He didn't like that all of B-Flight were on my side because they were Blenheim airmen too; maybe I looked like a schoolboy, but they knew I wasn't. I'd been their flight leader since August.

And sending us on a bombing raid with only a half-moon to light us, above cloud at twenty thousand feet? I was reckless with frustration.

"It's stupid, *stupid*—everyone knows it. The men are complaining. *You* know it's stupid. *Above the cloud?* We won't be able to see the sea, let alone ships in the dark! And the air's too thin up there for a Blenheim to operate efficiently. It's not like flying a Spitfire! We cruise best at fifteen thousand feet, and when we're in combat we take it as low as we can, it helps camouflage us. And the Jerries—the German fighters all *know* they can go higher and faster, and they circle like vultures, *waiting*—"

"None of my Spitfire pilots complained about danger," Cromwell said coldly. "I expect more of a young man of your caliber, *Beaufort-Stuart*. This sounds like lack of moral fiber."

Lack of moral fiber—that wonderful euphemism for cowardice.

I couldn't let him accuse me, or worse, my 648 Squadron airmen, of being cowards.

I said stiffly, "Sir. I'm leading B-Flight on a mission tonight. I want the best for them."

"When you go in at low level, you get shot up by enemy anti-aircraft guns," Cromwell told me, as if I didn't know. "We need to change our tactics."

It was true that most of our losses came from guns on the ground or at sea level. I couldn't argue with that. But I felt sure that a raid at twenty thousand feet would end in the same tears for different reasons, or at best, be completely pointless because we wouldn't hit anything. It wasn't the first time Coastal Command had tried it.

However, with no winning counterargument, off we went, hoping a few of us would make it back safely in five hours or so. Following orders.

The Blenheims were like a herd of shadowy brontosauri waiting on the airfield in the dark beneath the high cloud.

"Come on, Scotty, buck up," said David Silvermont, my navigator, as we lowered ourselves in our bulky flight suits through the forward hatch of that night's plane. Being the only Scot in the squadron meant that I mostly hadn't been called Jamie for the past year or so, except on leave. "We can't have you in a funk—it brings everybody down. The lads take your moods very seriously."

"Wing Commander Cromwell bloody well doesn't," I retorted. "I wish he'd have a go at you sometime instead of me."

"No chance, as you're the officer in charge. Anyway I am much bigger and older than you, and better looking too and probably smarter, so he doesn't dare."

"And you have a bigger head than me!" I laughed.

Most of those things were true, as David Silvermont was two years my senior and had been halfway through a medical degree when the war started. But he was also my best friend. He was easy to like and smooth with girls, with the brooding dark looks of a film star, and was good at breaking up fights and at

making me laugh. Silver read poetry before he went to bed; he played Mozart on the cracked fiddle he'd found in the officers' lounge when we were off duty; but those highbrow occupations didn't stop him plotting a course by dead reckoning, or spotting enemy convoys, or having a sense of humor.

He was a wizard navigator.

"What's up?" called our air gunner and wireless operator, Colin Oldham, from his place in the back of the Blenheim.

"Just the usual scrapping with Cromwell," I grumbled. "Accused me of 'lack of moral fiber.' "

"Rubbish! *He's* not flying tonight, is he!" Colin exclaimed.

"I expect he doesn't like your poncey double-barreled surname," Silver teased me. "It reminds the old Roundhead that your dad's the Earl of Craigie, and then he wants to start the Civil War over again. Can't have teenage toffs telling him what to do."

Colin howled. " 'The Old Roundhead!' Suits him!"

"I don't tell him what to do," I protested, checking the instruments and controls while Silver and Colin belted their harnesses in place. "I make polite suggestions about what *not* to do. And being the youngest of five sons doesn't mean a thing. They ran out of titles before they got to me."

"It's your classical education he doesn't like," put in Colin.

"I'll make a list, shall I? Perhaps if I were taller or bigger or grew a mustache—"

"He doesn't like me much, either," Silver said with sympathy.

"You both make him feel inferior," said Colin. "All that heady talk in the officers' lounge comparing hydraulics to blood pressure. He can't keep up."

"Hydraulics and blood pressure are endlessly fascinating," said Silver. He spread his chart on his knees, holding his electric torch ready in his gauntleted hand. He declared with satisfaction, "From tonight I shall always think of him as the Old Roundhead."

My B-Flight aircrews knew what we were doing that night—three planes in my own Pimms Section and three in Madeira

Section, with three men in each plane. In a few minutes I'd be in the sky in the dark in charge of eighteen men, counting myself, and in a few hours half of them would be dead.

I didn't know then what the full toll of that night would be, and I tried to lighten the tone as we set out. I called over the radio to Pimms and Madeira as we took off. "Setting course for target and climbing to twenty thousand feet, as per orders from the Old Roundhead."

Over the intercom I heard Colin behind me laughing again.

"The Old Roundhead might be keeping a listening watch," Silver warned me.

"I don't mind. I'll get another damned reprimand. He already knows what I think of him."

We flew obediently high, heading for a flotilla of German warships that was supposed to be cruising fifty miles off the Norwegian coast. After about an hour and a half, maybe we were over the ships we were supposed to hit and maybe we weren't. The sky was clear and blue-black, but the half-moon lit the thin cloud below us like a sheet of milky Chinese silk. I could see the other B-Flight planes standing out in black silhouette like decals against that cloud.

So, too, could the German Messerschmitt 110 night fighters on patrol.

We didn't have lights and neither did they, and we didn't see them coming. They can fly a hundred miles an hour faster than we can. But Silver and I both saw the streaks of green flame as the tracers flew from the first rounds of their thundering guns. And we saw the explosion of golden fire as the bullets struck an engine on another Blenheim in our formation.

Silver opened the observer's panel in the window next to his head and twisted around to stick his nose out so he could see behind us. "There's one on our tail!" he cried. "Dive, dive—"

"Down, *everybody* get down!" I called to my lads over the radio. "Use the cloud! Get into it or below it where they can't see you! Drop your bombs if you have to, lose the weight—"

I pushed my own plane into a nosedive. Our only hope against an Me-110 was to get away from it. Hide in cloud, camouflage yourself against the earth's surface. For a moment,

behind me, I could hear Colin's gun rattling back at our attackers.

In a Blenheim, the air gunner has to sit with his head up out of the plane in a bubble of Perspex like a goldfish bowl on a windowsill. The gunner's turret is often the first thing that goes when the Jerries are after you. And that's exactly what happened that night, with a deafening bang that I felt more than heard. *God*. The wind in the cockpit, after our turret exploded, howling around us as we sped toward the black sea below. The mess of blood and bone that had been Colin, all over the inside of the plane and the back of Silver's leather helmet.

That missed me, anyway—I was protected from Colin by the bulkhead between the pilot's seat and the radio equipment.

The sky went small and gray. I was diving too fast—in another few seconds the increased gravity would knock us out.

I must have leveled up somehow.

I skimmed so low over the sea, when I reached it, that the poor Blenheim's tail wheel snagged in a swell and snapped off.

In front of us, seawater erupted like a geyser as someone overhead got rid of their explosives, and I was too close to the surface to turn away from the pluming water-spout. I had to fly through it. We lost windowpanes in the front cockpit and Silver's charts were soaked, but we were still flying on the other side.

We were being bombed by our *own planes*.

We saw two Blenheims go plummeting in flames into the water around us while we struggled away from the waves.

It was the morning of 7 November 1940, and I was so stunned and spent after I landed back at our base in Shetland that I couldn't think. I shut down the engines, and Silver and I sat in silence. We didn't even try to get out.

Then a couple of mechanics climbed on the wing to open the hatches, and Silver looked up. He put a hand on my shoulder and said softly, "Nice flying, Scotty, as per usual. Thanks for getting us home."

He'd taken off his gloves to rescue the charts and to use the

pencils and flight calculator on the way back. His hands must have been freezing. But he made the same cheesy joke every time we landed safely—he'd be able to play the violin again. He pulled the little box of rosin from his knee pocket, the lucky charm that went with him on every op, and held it between thumb and fore-finger with both hands in front of his face.

"Look, everything still in one piece."

He couldn't *not* say it. He couldn't *not* take the rosin with him. I had a charm too, in the breast pocket of my uniform beneath my flight suit, a perfectly round quartz pebble from the Iron Age hill fort on my father's grouse moor.

"You're welcome," I croaked.

Our clothes were soaked with seawater and Colin Oldham's blood. It was all over the cockpit, and we had to climb through it to get out the hatch.

Half an hour later I sat down in front of Flight Officer Phyllis Pennyworth, our brisk, chirpy robin of a Women's Auxiliary Air Force interrogator who was in charge of grilling us after a mission—and I got so choked up I couldn't talk. I sat for a while with my elbows on my knees and my head in my hands, and she just let me do that, didn't say anything, knew what was coming—or guessed, anyway.

When I looked up, the pretty pink had faded a bit from her rosy cheeks. She loved us all very much. But in the debriefing room Pennyworth took care to be all business, and this time I was too broken and beat to do my job politely.

"Too many German planes to count," I told her. "Bloody Jerries in their bloody Messerschmitt 110s. Those Luftwaffe night fighters. Like a swarm of hornets—they know where we're coming from and what we're after, and they're a million miles an hour faster than us—"

"Not a million, Scotty," Phyllis corrected gently. Using my nickname instead of my rank title the way most of my lads did, so that I knew she cared, but reminding me to be precise so she could make an accurate report. She was a stickler for rules herself, and she was scared of the Old Roundhead.

"Might as well be a million." It came out as a sort of sob. "These old Blenheims we fly, these airborne buckets of bolts

we're in, these crates don't have a chance against a Messerschmitt 110 night fighter!"

And I gave a real sob then, because of Colin.

I didn't tell Phyllis Pennyworth about the mess. She'd seen our busted-up plane—half the glass in the front cockpit punched out, a furrow plowed in the airfield behind us by our tail because we'd lost the tail wheel, the gaping hole where the gunner's turret used to be. She wasn't stupid; she knew what had happened to Colin. She waited while I tried to pull myself together, and when I still didn't say anything, she sighed and put down her pen and lit a cigarette for me.

I took it and my hands didn't shake. I hadn't lost my nerve—I was angry. Not just at the Germans, our enemy. I was angry at my commanding officer, at Wing Commander Talbot Cromwell, for being so blind to what we were up against, and at Coastal Command itself, whoever they were, making impossible rules in some comfortable headquarters in England while we bled our lives out in unforgiving sky and sea.

I tried to smoke. Phyllis passed me her ashtray. I was nearly angry at her, too, behaving herself and reporting to them. But she was good at her job, unlike Cromwell; she'd been with us since June and she knew us well.

"When we fly that high the mission is absolutely pointless, but when we come in at a low level to bomb the German ships, we get shot up by their anti-aircraft guns," I said bitterly. "I just want an advantage, you know? I want to know where their submarines are, or if there are night fighters about, before they're on top of us. Some wee thing. *One thing* that we can do better than the Germans. One surprising smack in their faces."

"We stopped the invasion," Phyllis said. "You helped too, two months ago when we were fighting the Battle of Britain. We made them back off. That was a smack in their faces."

"Now they're bombing our cities to blazes—that's not backing off!"

"We all want revenge," Phyllis said softly.

That surprised me a little. I didn't think of earnest, diligent Flight Officer Pennyworth as someone who had unwholesome emotions that might involve a thirst for blood. I glanced up at

her, thinking she might be offering mechanical sympathy to another shot-down airman—or I suppose I should say *shot up*, not *shot down*, as I'd managed to bring the crate back and land it in one piece.

Her eyes were red and her mouth was set in a stubborn, steely pout. I guess Flight Officer Pennyworth got the job partly because she didn't cry easily. Maybe she did want revenge.

"We'll win," Phyllis said firmly. "We'll keep fighting, and someday we'll win fair and square."

I'd let my cigarette go out. I dumped it in the ashtray. What had Cromwell told me?

We need to change our tactics.

"I don't want to win fair and square anymore," I said through my teeth. *"I want to cheat."*

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THE PEARL THIEF

Elizabeth Wein

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to break the friendships formed—

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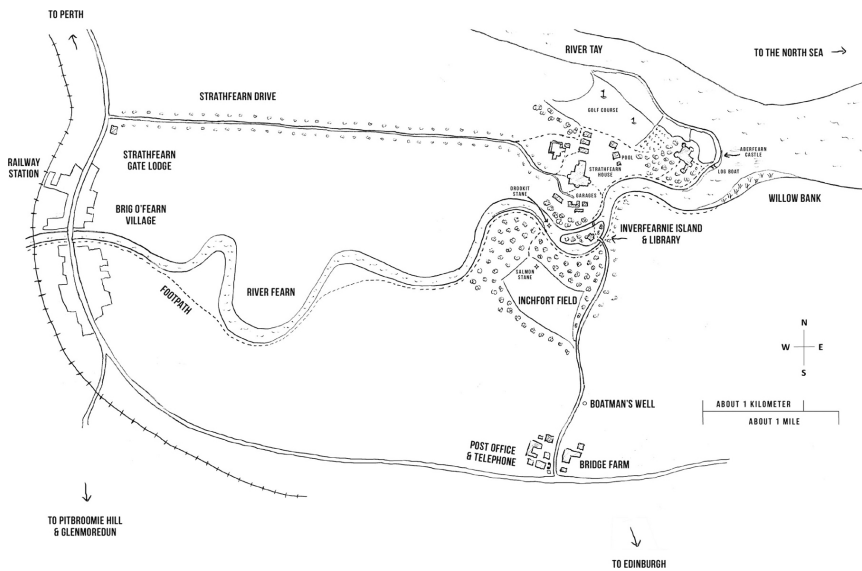
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O, my love's like a red, red rose,
that's newly sprung in June;
O, my love's like the melody
that's sweetly play'd in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
so deep in love am I,
and I will love thee still, my dear,
till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
and the rocks melt wi' the sun:
I will love thee still, my dear,
while the sands o' life shall run.

And fare thee well, my only love!
And fare thee well awhile!
And I will come again, my love,
tho' it were ten thousand mile.

—Robert Burns

Part 1

WHAT HAPPENED

15-28 JUNE 1938

1. An assortment of things gone missing

“You’re a brave lassie.”

That’s what my grandfather told me as he gave me his shotgun.

“Stand fast and guard me,” he instructed. “If this fellow tries to fight, you give him another dose.”

Granddad turned back to the moaning man he’d just wounded. The villain was lying half-sunk in the mud on the edge of the riverbank, clutching his leg where a cartridgeful of lead pellets had emptied into his thigh. It was a late-summer evening, my last with Granddad before I went off to boarding school for the first time, and we’d not expected to shoot anything bigger than a rabbit. But here I was aiming a shotgun at a living man while Granddad waded into the burn, which is what we called the River Fearn where it flowed through his estate, so he could tie the evildoer’s hands behind his back with the strap of his shotgun.

“Rape a burn, would you!” Granddad railed at him while he worked. “I’ve never seen the like! You’ve destroyed that shell bed completely. Two hundred river mussels round about, piled there like a midden heap! And you’ve not found a single pearl, have you? Because you don’t know a pearl mussel from your own backside! You’re like a bank robber that’s never cracked a safe or seen a banknote!”

It was true—the man had torn through dozens of river mussels, methodically splitting the shells open one by one in the hope of finding a rare and beautiful Scottish river pearl. The flat rock at the edge of the riverbank was littered with the broken and dying remains.

Granddad’s shotgun was almost too heavy for me to hold steady. I kept it jammed against my shoulder with increasingly aching arms. I swear by my glorious ancestors, that man was twice Granddad’s size. Of course, Granddad was not a very big man—none of us Murrys are very big. And he was in his seventies, even though he wasn’t yet ill. The villain had a pistol—he’d dropped it when he’d been hurt, but it wasn’t out of reach. Without me there to guard Granddad as he bound the other man, they might have ended up in a duel. *Brave!* I felt like William Wallace, Guardian of Scotland.

The wounded man was both pathetic and vengeful. “I’ll see you in Sheriff Court,” he told my grandfather, whining and groaning. “I’m not after salmon and there’s no law against pearl fishing, but it’s illegal to shoot a man.”

Granddad wasn’t scared. “This is a private river.”

“Those tinker folk take pearls here all the time. They come in their tents and bide a week like gypsies, and go away with their pockets full!”

"No tinker I know would ever rape a burn like this! And they've the decency to ask permission on my private land! There's laws and laws. Respect for a river and its creatures goes unwritten. And the written law says that I can haul you in for poaching on my beat, whether it's salmon or pearls or anything else."

"I didn't—I wasnae—"

"Whisht. Never mind what you were doing in the water: you pointed your own gun at my wee granddaughter." Granddad now confiscated the pistol that was lying in the mud, and tucked it into his willow-weave fisherman's creel. "That's excuse enough for me. I'm the Earl of Strathfearn. Whose word will the law take, laddie, yours or mine?"

Of course Granddad owned all of Strathfearn then, and the salmon- and trout-fishing rights that went with it. It was a perfect little Scottish estate, with a ruined castle and a baronial manor, nestled in woodland just where the River Fearn meets the River Tay. It's true it's not illegal for anyone to fish for pearls there, but it's still private land. You can't just wade in and destroy someone else's river. I remember how shocking Granddad's accusation sounded: *Rape a burn, would you!*

Was that only three years ago? It feels like Granddad was ill for twice that long. And now he's been dead for months. And the estate was sold and changed hands, even while my poor grandmother was still living in it. Granddad was so *alive* then. We'd worked together.

"Steady, lass," he'd said, seeing my arms trembling. I held on while Granddad dragged the unfortunate mussel-bed destroyer to his feet and helped him out of the burn and onto the riverbank, trailing forget-me-nots and muck and blood. I flinched out of his way in distaste.

He'd aimed a pistol at me earlier. I'd been ahead of Granddad on the river path and the strange man had snarled at me: *One step closer and you're asking for trouble*. I'd hesitated, not wanting to turn my back on his gun. But Granddad had taken the law into his own hands and fired first.

Now, as the bound, bleeding prisoner struggled past me so he could pull himself over to the flat rock and rest amid the broken mussel shells, our eyes met for a moment in mutual hatred. I wondered if he really would have shot at me.

"Now see here," Granddad lectured him, getting out his hip flask and allowing the wounded man to take a taste of the Water of Life. "See the chimneys rising above the birches at the river's bend? That's the County Council's old library on Inverfearnie Island, and there's a telephone there. You and I are going to wait here while the lassie goes to ring the police." He turned to me. "Julie, tell them to send the Water Bailiff out here. He's the one to deal with a poacher. And then I want you to stay there with the librarian until I come and fetch you. Her name is Mary Kinnaird."

I gave an internal sigh of relief—not a visible one, because being called *brave* by my granddad was the highest praise I'd ever aspired to,

but relief nevertheless. Ringing the police from the Inverfearnie Library was a mission I felt much more capable of completing than shooting a trespasser. I gave Granddad back his shotgun ceremoniously. Then I sprinted for the library, stung by nettles on the river path and streaking my shins with mud. I skidded over the mossy stones on the humpbacked bridge that connects Inverfearnie Island to the east bank of the Fearn, and came to a breathless halt before the stout oak door of the seventeenth-century library building, churning up the gravel of the drive with my canvas shoes as if I were the messenger at the Battle of Marathon.

It was past six and the library was closed. I knew that Mary Kinnaird, the new librarian and custodian who lived there all alone, had only just finished university; but I'd never met her, and it certainly never occurred to me that she wouldn't be able to hear the bell. When nobody came, not even after I gave a series of pounding kicks to the door, I decided the situation was desperate enough to warrant breaking in and climbing through a window. They were casement windows that opened outward—if I broke a pane near a latch it would be easy to get in. I snatched up a handful of stones from the gravel drive and hurled them hard at one of the leaded windowpanes nearest the ground. The glass smashed explosively, and I could hear the rocks hitting the floor inside like hailstones.

That brought the young librarian running with a shotgun of her own. She threw open the door.

She was bold as a crow. I stared at her openly, not because of the flat, skewed features of her face, but because she was aiming at my head. The library window I'd smashed was public property. Nothing for it but to plunge in: "Miss Kinnaird?" I panted, out of breath after my marathon. "My granddad has caught a poacher and I—I need to use your telephone—to ring the police."

Her smooth, broad brow crinkled into the tiniest of irritated frowns. She'd sensed the importance of what I'd said, but she hadn't heard all of it. Now she lowered her gun, and I could see that around her neck hung two items essential to her work: a gold mechanical pencil on a slender rope of braided silk, and a peculiar curled brass horn, about the size of a fist, on a thick gold chain. She'd lowered the gun so she could hold the beautiful horn to her ear.

"Your granddad needs help?" she said tartly. "Speak up, please."

"STRATHFEARN HAS CAUGHT A THIEF, AND I NEED TO USE YOUR TELEPHONE," I bellowed into the ear trumpet.

The poor astonished young woman gasped. "Oh! Strathfearn is your grandfather?"

"Aye, Sandy Murray, Earl of Strathfearn," I said with pride.

"Well, you'd better come in," she told me briskly. "I'll ring the police for you."

I wondered how she managed the telephone if she couldn't hear, but I didn't dare to ask.

"Granddad said to send Sergeant Angus Henderson," I said. "He's the Water Bailiff for the Strathfearn estate. He polices the riverbank."

"Oh, aye, I know Angus Henderson."

She shepherded me past the wood-and-glass display cases on the ground floor and into her study. But I poked my head around the door to watch her sitting at the telephone in its dark little nook of a cupboard under the winding stairs. I listened as she asked the switchboard operator to put her through to the police station in the village at Brig O'Fearn. There was a sort of Bakelite ear trumpet attached to the telephone receiver. So that answered my question.

I went and sat down in the big red leather reading chair in Mary Kinnaird's study, feeling rather stunned and exhausted, and after a few minutes she came in with a tray of tea and shortbread.

"I expect Granddad will pay for your window," I told her straightaway. I assumed his wealth was limitless, three years ago. I hoped he wouldn't be angry, and I wondered how he was getting on, waiting alone with the vicious and miserable prisoner. "I'm very sorry I had to break the glass."

"And I am very sorry I pointed my gun at you." Mary knelt on the floor beside me, there being no other chair but the one behind her desk. She offered the shortbread. I found I was ravenous.

"Oh, I knew you wouldn't hurt me," I told her. "You are too bonny."

"You wee sook!" she scolded. "Bonny?"

"Not beautiful," I told her truthfully. "Your face is kind. You're sort of fluttery and quiet, like a pigeon."

She threw her head back and laughed.

"Prrrrrt," she said in pigeon-talk, and this made me laugh too. Suddenly I liked her very much.

"What's your name?" she asked me.

"Lady Julia Lindsay MacKenzie Wallace Beaufort-Stuart," I reeled off glibly.

"Oh my, that is quite a name. Must I call you Lady Julia?"

"Granddad calls me Julie."

"I will compromise with Julia. Beaufort and Stuart are both the names of Scottish queens; I can't quite lower myself to Julie." She smiled serenely. "Not Murray? Isn't that your grandfather's name?"

"Some of my brothers have Murray as a family name."

"You know the Murrays were in favor with Mary Stuart. There's a bracelet on display in the library that belonged to her when she was a child. She gave it to your grandfather's people because she was their patron, four hundred years ago."

"Scottish river pearls—I know! Granddad showed me when I was little. They're the only thing I remember about the display cases. All

those dull old books along with this beautiful wee bracelet that belonged to Mary Queen of Scots! And I'm related to her on the Stuart side."

Mary laughed. "Those books are first editions of Robert Burns's poems! I don't find them dull. But the pearls are everybody's favorite."

My hidden criminal inner self noted what an idiot the wounded trespasser was, stripping young mussels from the river when this perfect treasure lay in plain sight of the general public every day.

But perhaps the river seemed easier prey than Mary Kinnaird.

She said to me then: "So I'm a Mary and you're a Stuart. And I have the keys to the case. Would you like to try on Mary Queen of Scots' pearl bracelet while you wait for your granddad to come back for you?"

Mary Kinnaird suddenly became my favorite person in the entire world.

I noticed something. "How can you hear me without your trumpet?"

"I'm watching your mouth move. It helps a great deal to see your mouth straight on. I don't like the trumpet much."

"The trumpet is *splendid*."

She twisted her mouth again. It wasn't a smile. "But the trumpet makes me different from everyone else. And I am already a bit different."

"No one's *exactly* alike," I said blithely. "I can find my mother in a candlelit hall full of dancers by the scent she wears. Everybody's different."

It was very easy for me to say, flush with the fear and triumph of my last summer afternoon with my grandfather, the Earl of Strathfearn. I was safe now eating shortbread in the Inverfearnie Library, and looking forward to trying on pearls that had once been worn by Mary Queen of Scots. *Everybody's different*: it was easy for me to say.

"You're a brave lassie!"

It was a perfect echo of Granddad, but of course now it wasn't Granddad and there wasn't a life at stake. It was only the taxi driver congratulating me.

"A lass like you, taking the train alone across Europe! Times have changed."

"I had my own berth on the Night Ferry," I told him modestly. "Men and women are separated."

I didn't tell him I was coming home from my Swiss *boarding school* for the summer holidays—I'd spent the entire trip carefully trying to disguise myself as being closer to twenty than to sixteen. I'd put my hair up in a chignon and hidden my ridiculously babyish panama school hat in a big paper bag. With my childish socks and school blazer crammed into my overnight case and the collar of my blouse undone, and the help of a lipstick bought in the rail station in Paris, I thought I pulled off a believable imitation of someone old enough to have left school.

"But I did arrange the journey myself," I couldn't help boasting. "My people aren't expecting me for another three days. It may be my own fault I've lost my luggage, though. I think it is having its own little secret holiday in a hidden corner of the port at Dunkirk."

The taxi driver laughed. Now we were on the Perth Road on our way to Strathfearn House. Nearly there—nearly! Scotland, summer, the river, Granddad...

And then that moment when I realized all over again that Granddad was gone forever, and this was the *last* summer at Strathfearn.

"My grandfather died earlier this year, and my grandmother's selling their house," I told the taxi driver. "My mother and I are going to help her with the packing up."

"Oh, aye, Strathfearn House—he was a good man, Sandy Murray, Earl of Strathfearn. I saw in the *Perth Mercury* that the Glenfearn School bought the estate. They've been working like Trojans to get the house and grounds ready for the students to move in next term. Lucky lads! Your granddad had a nine-hole golf course out there, didn't he? Good deal of debt, though—"

Bother the *Mercury*. I hoped they hadn't published an amount, although I supposed they must have printed some number when the estate went up for sale, including the house and everything in it that my grandmother hadn't brought with her from France in 1885. She must have been so ashamed. Granddad left tens of thousands of pounds' worth of debt. Originally he lost a great deal of money when the stock market collapsed in 1929, but then he added to it by borrowing to put a new roof on Strathfearn House; then he'd had to sell parts of the estate to pay back the loan; and then he'd been struck with bone cancer. And the treatment, and the visits to specialists in Europe and America, and the alterations to the house so he could go on living in it, and the private nurses—

And suddenly I was longing to be at Strathfearn, even if it wasn't ours anymore; longing to see my mother and grandmother and my friend Mary Kinnaird, longing for one last summer of childish freedom on the River Fearn; but also full of grown-up excitement about being included as someone sensible enough to help settle the Murray Estate, when any one of my five big brothers could have done it. I didn't want the summer to begin. I didn't want it to end.

The taxi could not go right up to the house because a digger and a steamroller were engaged in widening the drive. I had to put the fare on my mother's account, but the driver just laughed and said he knew where to find us. I got out to walk the last third of a mile.

The first person I recognized was Sergeant Angus Henderson, the Water Bailiff whom Granddad sent for to take custody of the pearl thief we caught. Henderson was there with his bicycle, with his tall hooked cromach across the bars as if he were about to do a high-wire act and

needed a long stick to balance him. He was having a row with the driver of the steamroller.

"I've told you before to keep your men off the path by the Fearn when they're ditch-digging!" the Water Bailiff roared. "Bad enough the place is crawling with those dirty tinker folk camped up in Inchfort Field, in and out the water looking for pearls. That river path to the Inverfearnie Library is off-limits to your men."

"Those men are digging the pipeline for the new swimming pool—how d'you expect them to stay off the river path?" steamed the roller driver. "All the work is downstream of Inverfearnie. I dinnae want them mixed up with those sleekit tinkers anyway. Bloody light-fingered sneaks. You'd not believe how many tools go missing, spades and whatnot."

I did not want to get caught in the cross fire of this battle. Sergeant Angus Henderson is a terrifyingly tall and gaunt ex-Black Watch Regiment policeman. Granddad told us that in the heat of the Great War, Henderson allegedly shot one of his own men in the back for running away from a battle, and then strangled a German officer, an enemy Hun, with his bare hands.

"I'm off down the Fearn path now, and if I catch any of your men there—" Henderson let the threat hang, but gave his cromach a shake.

The Water Bailiff had been known to thrash every single one of my five brothers for some reason or other in the past—guddling for rainbow trout out of the brown trout season, or swimming when the salmon were running, or just for getting in his way as he patrolled the narrow path along the burn on his bicycle.

I stepped back so I was well out of his way as he set off along the drive ahead of me. When he'd become nothing but a dark beetling shape among the bright green beeches, I held tight to my small overnight case and set off after him, considerably more slowly. I was looking forward to getting out of my modified school uniform if I could. But the dark skirt and white blouse did give me a smart official air, like a post office clerk or a prospective stenographer for the Glenfearn School, and the men working on the drive paid no attention to me.

My grandmother's roses in the French forecourt garden in front of Strathfearn House were blooming in a glorious, blazing riot of June color, oblivious to the chaos throughout the rest of the grounds. There were people all about, hard at work building new dormitories and classrooms and playing fields. None of them were people I recognized. I let myself into the house—the doors were wide open.

The whole of the baronial reception hall had been emptied of its rosewood furniture and stripped of the ancestral paintings. I felt as though I had never been there before in my life.

I went straight to my grandmother's favorite sitting room and discovered it was also in disarray; and my remaining family members were nowhere to be found. Of course I hadn't told anyone I was coming

three days earlier than expected. So like a hunted fox bolting to the safety of its den, I sought out the nursery bathroom high in the back of the east wing, and drew myself a bath because I had been travelling for three days and the hot water seemed to be working as usual.

I didn't have any clean clothes of my own to change into, but it is a good big bathroom, and in addition to a six-foot-long tub and painted commode there is a tall chest full of children's cast-offs. I put on a moth-y tennis pullover which left my arms daringly bare and a kilt that must have been forgotten some time ago by one of my big brothers (probably Sandy, who was Granddad's favorite, his namesake and his heir, and who had spent more time there than the rest of us).

I was David Balfour from *Kidnapped* again, the way I'd been the whole summer I was thirteen, to my brothers' amusement and my nanny Solange's despair. I plaited my hair and stuffed it up under a shapeless faded wool tam-o'-shanter to get it out of my face, and wove my way through the passages back to the central oak staircase.

The banisters were covered with dust sheets because the walls had just been painted a modern cool, pale blue—not horrible, but so *different* from the heraldic Victorian wallpaper. Light in shades of lemon and sapphire and scarlet spilled through the tall stained-glass window on the landing. As I turned the corner, the telephone in the hall below me started to ring.

I swithered on the landing, wondering if I should answer it. But then I heard footsteps and a click, and the ringing stopped, and a harassed man's voice said, "Yes, this is he—No, they're not gypsies; they're tinkers. Scottish Travellers. It's tiresome, but they're allowed to stay in that field till the end of this summer—" The voice took a sudden change of tone and continued brightly: "Oh, you've sent the Water Bailiff up there *now*? My foreman thinks they're pretty bold thieves—wants him to check all their gear for missing tools—Jolly good!" His footsteps thumped smartly back the way they'd come.

Goodness, everyone seemed to have it in for the Travelling folk.

This Scottish traveller didn't bother anybody. If the ditch-diggers were all downstream and the Water Bailiff was off bothering the campers at Inchfort Field, I could count on having the river path to the library on Inverfearnie Island all to myself. I thought I would go say hello to Mary Kinnaird, who would not care if I was wearing only a kilt and a tennis pullover.

I crossed the broad lawn, broken by men smoothing earth and digging pits and laying paths. In the distance by the edge of the River Tay, over the tops of the birch trees, I could see the ruinous towers of Aberfearn Castle. The Big House is new by comparison; it was built in 1840, before Granddad was born. Before the railway came through. It was hard to believe that none of this was ours anymore.

I passed into the dapple of sunlight and shade in the birchwood by

the river.

An otter slid into the burn as I started along the path, and I saw a kingfisher darting among the low branches trailing in the water on the opposite bank. For a moment I stood still, watching and breathing it in. The smell of the Tay and the Fearn! Oh, how I'd missed it, and how I would miss it after this last summer! See me, kilted and barefoot on the native soil of my ancestors, declaiming Allan Cunningham in dramatic rhapsody:

*O hame, hame, hame, to my ain countree!
When the flower is i' the bud and the leaf is on the tree,
The larks shall sing me hame in my ain countree!*

I crossed from the west bank of the Fearn to Inverfearnie Island by the footbridge. It is a creaky old iron suspension bridge so narrow you can't pass two abreast, erected in the year of Queen Victoria's Jubilee. I jumped along its span to make it sway, the way my brothers and I had always done when we were little. The library stood proud on the unnatural mound of Inverfearnie Island, which Granddad always told us might hide a Bronze Age burial site beneath it. The oak front door of the library was locked, just as it had been three years ago.

This time, knowing Mary much better than I used to, I went round to the kitchen door. It was standing ajar.

"MARY?"

I let myself in, hollering, because she can never hear you.

The kitchen was tidy and empty. I went through to her study, yelling my friend's name. She wasn't there, either, and it was also tidy and empty, as if she hadn't been in all day.

I glanced into the telephone cupboard with its red velvet stool, in the dark little nook under the winding stairs. No one. I went through to the library.

The library is two rooms on top of each other, the walls surrounded by shelves and scarcely a single book newer than before the Great War, apart from recent volumes of antiquarian journals and almanacs. But they still lend books to anglers and Scots-language scholars and farmers trying to solve boundary disputes, and there is almost always someone or other studying in the Upper Reading Room.

I spared a reverent glance for the pearl bracelet. It lay locked under glass on its bed of black velvet, on permanent loan to the Perth and Kinross Council for display in the library here. I couldn't quite believe Mary had let me try those pearls on. They were beautiful fat Tay river pearls, so pale a gray they shone nearly like silver, the size of small marbles. Staring into the glass until it began to get fogged by my own breath, I could remember exactly how they'd felt against my wrist, cool

and heavy with the magic of having been worn by Mary Stuart herself, whose surname I shared, as young as me and already Queen of Scotland.

I wiped the glass and turned away to continue the hunt for my own living Mary. I took the narrow winding steps to the Upper Reading Room of the library two at a time.

“AHOY, MARY!”

And the Upper Reading Room was empty, too.

But here was a strange thing. The Upper Reading Room was empty, but unlike the rest of Mary Kinnaird’s domain, it was not tidy. The great big chestnut table was covered end to end in ephemera and artifacts. I recognized these as what my brothers and I called “the Murray Hoard”: intriguing archaeological finds that our grandfather used to keep on display in the tower room at Strathfearn House. I guessed that this must be a grand sorting job, with Mary called upon to catalog the priceless ancient pieces before they went to auction. Iron and bronze spear tips, all different sizes and shapes, lay in rows, with more waiting in cigar boxes; I recognized an iridescent Roman glass vial shaped like a leaping fish, which was, Granddad told me, nearly two thousand years old; and the dark polished stone ax heads were eerily three times that.

And there was my favorite item, a small round cup made of blackened wood set in silver filigree. I could picture it sitting in a back corner of a dusty glass case in the tower of the Big House, full to the brim with loose pearls like the ones on the bracelet downstairs. I had never been allowed to touch the cup, but Granddad had let me play with the pearls when I was very small.

My mother’s mother’s mother’s, he’d said they were. I can’t remember how many “mothers” back they went. All those pearls were found in Scottish rivers. I’d loved the way that, of all the ancient artifacts in his collection, only the pearls didn’t look old. Like the royal pearls downstairs, they were as beautiful and ageless as the rivers where they’d been grown.

Now the cup was empty. The pearls were gone. Another wave of sadness washed over me. I’d felt instinctively that they belonged in that cup. Granddad must have sold them, as he’d sold so many of his heirlooms and so much of his land, to keep the estate going during his illness.

I was surprised that Mary would have gone out leaving a door open with all this valuable stuff lying about. She takes her job as the Inverfearnie Library custodian very seriously.

I poked my nose into the other rooms, her bedroom and the bathroom, but Mary was nowhere to be found.

I decided to leave her a note. I went back up to where she’d been working. There was paper everywhere, but all covered with lists and descriptions of artifacts. Finally I settled on an empty brown envelope addressed to my grandfather and postmarked “Oxford” from two years

ago. The back was engraved with the name of a scholar I'd never heard of from the Ashmolean Museum. The envelope had been slit open with a knife or letter opener long ago, and whatever message it had once contained was not lying about in an obvious place. It didn't seem important in any way, so I wrote to Mary on the back quickly to say that I was home in Scotland and staying at Strathfearn House for the next few weeks, and that I would stop in again to visit.

Here was another odd thing. When I went to prop my message against a chipped clay pot of unknown origin, in front of the pushed-back chair where Mary would be sure to see it when she came back, a pearl fell out of the envelope.

I thought it dropped off *me* at first—as if I'd been wearing it in my hair, or as an earring! It was the palest rose-petal pink, the size of a barley grain and perfectly round. It hit the green baize table cover with a sound like *pip* and lay still. It was intact and beautiful.

I picked it up—it was so round I had to wedge it beneath my fingernail to get hold of it. It must have been part of the collection. I thought of dropping it into the black wooden cup. But sensibly afraid of disturbing the cataloging system, I put it back inside the envelope it had fallen out of. I folded the envelope over so the pearl couldn't fall out again and propped it against one of the jam jars.

I went back outside, leaving the kitchen door a little open behind me the way I'd found it. The hammering and drilling and tractoring going on at the Big House and farther downstream was no more than a faint hum. I didn't feel like going back to the Big House. I thought I'd go look at the Drookit Stane and the Salmon Stane, the standing stones in the river and Inchfort Field, just to make sure the builders hadn't knocked them down to make an access road or boat ramp or something. Maybe I'd just peek at the one in Inchfort Field without leaving the birchwood. I didn't want to get mixed up with the Water Bailiff.

I went down the gravel driveway and crossed the humped bridge of moss-covered stone, as old as the seventeenth-century library itself, that leads to the opposite bank of the Fearn. Then I continued along the path on the other side of the river.

Where the burn bends it has scooped out a little shingle beach on one bank where we used to swim. There was a heron standing midstream near the tall Drookit Stane, absolutely still, fixed on fishing. Its shadow was dark against the stone and its reflection rippled in the water. I stopped still, too—but not still enough. It heard me and lifted off awkwardly, heading downstream with long, slow wingbeats.

I sat down on the flat sun-dappled rock slab where the wounded poacher had rested, and where Granddad had taught me and my brothers to guddle for trout. I wondered if I could still catch a fish using only my hands. No one was about, not even the heron, and I was overcome with a wave of sadness over my grandfather and his house and his things that

weren't ours anymore, and all the summers that would never come back.

So I lay down and slid my bare arm into the clear brown water.

There. I was minding my own business, waiting for a fish to tickle. I suppose I didn't really have any right to fish there, because it wasn't our land any longer. Julie the poacher!

I thought about the pearls that I'd never see again, and all my grandmother had lost. I thought about picking an armful of her own roses for her. The plan improved: I'd have to dig some up so she could take them with her when she had to leave the house for good.

I'd not slept well on the trains across Europe. I'd been travelling for three days. I was lying in the sun and lulled by the sound of running water, and I fell asleep thinking about roses.

I remember what it looked like when my head exploded with light and darkness, but I didn't remember anything else until the moment I found myself in St. John's Infirmary in Perth three days later.

2. No modesty at all

I don't think I am capable of describing the headache with which I woke up.

For a long time I lay very still, not daring to move and wishing I would lose consciousness again. When it became clear that this was not going to happen, I opened my eyes.

My friend Mary Kinnaird was sitting beside me, reading a book.

She was wearing her usual tweed skirt and a powder-blue blouse and a dreadful prickly cardigan like the sheepskin in the story of Jacob and Esau. I had no idea where I was or how I'd got there. But if Mary Kinnaird was sitting next to me calmly reading, I knew I was perfectly safe. I said, "Hullo, Mary."

She didn't hear me. I waved.

She was so startled she dropped the book. Her smooth, broad brow crinkled with distress. Then she leaped out of her chair and landed on her knees next to me by the bed in which I'd been laid out, and grabbed my hands and exclaimed, "Oh, *Julia!* Julia, do you know me?"

"Of course I know you, Mary," I said peevishly.

"I'm sorry, darling, you're speaking into my bad ear—" Flustered, she dropped my hands to hold up the beautiful brass horn. "Can you see? Can you hear me properly? What *happened?* Oh dear, now that you're awake I really should go ring your mother. Julia—can you speak? How do you feel?"

I wanted to tell her to shut up or her blethering was going to kill me. I wanted to tell her it didn't matter whether I could see or speak and that I didn't care if she wanted to go and ring the King. I couldn't possibly tell her what had happened because not only did I not know, due to my fearsome headache I never wanted even to find out.

I knew she could read my lips if I was facing her. I turned toward her on the pillow and said clearly, gazing into her eyes, "Please cut my head off."

"Oh, *darling,*" Mary Kinnaird said, and kissed me. "I don't think anyone but me knows you're here! The ward sister was rather run off her feet when I came in, and I haven't had a chance to explain to her who you are. You were brought in here to the hospital two days ago by a family of travelling tinker folk, and they didn't know who you were, either. Everyone thought you were one of them! There was a story about it on the front page of the *Perth Mercury*—"Tinker Lass Left for Dead on Riverbank"! Why aren't your people worried about you?"

"I came home early without telling them....I'm not supposed to get

here till Saturday. Two days, you said? It's *Friday*?"

"Saturday. The tinkers kept you with them overnight when they found you. They brought you here the next day."

"*Saturday!*" I gasped in disbelief.

I'd been unconscious since *Wednesday*.

It was the most tremendous thing that had ever happened to me.

"But how did you know the person in the *Mercury* was me?"

"Of course you'd left me a note, darling. Only I didn't find it till this morning. The library's shut all day on Wednesdays, so I can get the shopping in the morning before early closing in the village, and I was out when you came in. And then when I found your note I guessed that the girl left unconscious on the riverbank might be you, and I was *dreadfully* worried—especially as it was a lad that found you, lying at the edge of Inchfort Field with a great dunt on your head. Did he—did he *do something* to you, darling?"

"What kind of something?"

"Oh—well—*anything*. You know. Any *thing*."

I was still too dazed to be alarmed at this subtle innuendo, though obviously I'd nearly had my head smashed in. Surely not by the same person who said he'd found me unconscious? Who'd be stupid enough to ambush someone and then deliver her to the hospital?

I began to take an inventory of my working parts as Mary spoke. Impossible to move my head without being sick. Crikey! Did someone actually hit me, or did I somehow crack my skull on the slab of rock I'd been sitting on? My tongue caught on the jagged edge of a tooth—it was chipped. I poked gingerly at the snaggly enamel with a fingertip, then moved my hand so my friend could see my mouth shape these words:

"Oh, Mary! Do I look like a hag?"

She answered a little briskly: "You're quite as lovely as ever."

It was probably the most thoughtless thing I'd ever said to her.

I wished I'd never woken up. I wished I could start all over again and never have let her see vain, coquettish Julie, whose first thought in the *world* is always for the way people see her. Mary Kinnaird lives like a hermit most of the time because people who don't treat her like a cretin are *scared* of her. She has the kindest face in the world, but it is not a face like everyone else's.

When you say something that hurtful it only draws attention to it if you try to take it back. So I didn't. I reached farther up my head to explore the bump and the bandages, and discovered what was left of my hair.

I am ashamed to put down here what happened next, but I shall, as a sort of penance for being so utterly shallow.

"Oh, Mary, how *could* you! 'Quite as lovely as ever.' Oh, what *happened*, who did this to me, *why*?"

I sobbed pitifully. You could say like a three-year-old, except that I

would not have howled about my hair when I was three.

It was *all gone*.

I could feel the different lengths all around my head—much shorter near the great big bump than on the sides. I think the doctor sawed it off tidily at the back of my head first, to get at the wound, and then that—that *witch* of a nurse took the rest off to even it up.

“What will everyone say when I go back to school?” I wailed. “That cat Nancy Brooke will laugh her head off. And *just* when I’m *finally* old enough to wear it up for dances—and my sixteenth birthday coming—”

Well, I am embarrassed. But that is what I said, and more besides.

“Darling, don’t cry over your hair, for goodness’ sake,” Mary scolded. “That’s not the brave lassie I know at all!”

Her voice was warmer now. I think she must have attributed my excess of vanity to the dunt on my head, because she hastened on to more important things.

“Now, I’ll say it again, because I’m afraid you’re a bit woozy—you said your people are expecting you back today, but they’ve no idea you’re here, so I must tell them now. I suppose I should have rung someone *before* I came to see if it was really you, but the papers this morning said you hadn’t woken up yet and I thought, if it *was* you, it was more important someone should be with you when you *did* wake up....”

She trailed off. I think it is lack of company in general that makes her so loquacious with people she trusts. Just now it left me rather breathless with emotion and confusion.

“Anyway, I *must* go tell your lady mother!” she finished with great purpose.

“Please warn my mother’s companion, Solange, about my hair,” I said selflessly. “She was my nanny and she will be just as upset as I am.”

Mary Kinnaird got up and hurried off back to Strathfearn.

I managed to roll over on my side and was able to get a better view of the rest of the ward. The explosive headache began to subside, and I grew increasingly aware that my mouth felt like it was full of sandpaper. I hadn’t eaten or drunk anything for three days—apparently I’d been given fluid injections while I was unconscious, but I was desperate for a glass of water. I had no idea how to get anyone’s attention, and I thought I could help myself to a drink from the jug on the trolley at the end of the bed next to mine.

Gravity helped me to topple out of my own bed. They had dressed me in a hospital gown that felt like it was made out of newspaper, tied at the neck and waist and otherwise completely open to the elements. It did not cover my backside as I crawled to the trolley.

It all took a lot longer than I expected it to, and when I got there I couldn’t stand up or lift the jug.

Defeated, I crawled indecently back to my own bed—getting into it was like scaling Mont Blanc. All the exercise combined to set upon my skewed equilibrium as if I were at sea in a Tay coble in a tempest. I had to stop and close my eyes and take some deep breaths before I attempted the battle to get back under the covers.

I heard somebody say, “Dirty wee besom. You saw that? Bold as brass. Asking for trouble.”

And a voice that answered, “That’s their kind. *No modesty at all.*”

I seem to be good at asking for trouble.

I was not so successful at asking for water. Although I finally had the attention of the nurse on the ward and spoke politely, she downright refused me.

“Not if you put on airs, you sleekit Lady Muck,” she told me in tones of Cairngorm mountain granite. “I’ll not be mocked by your kind.” She actually took hold of the trolley that held the water jug and wheeled it away.

I was left gaping. What had I *done*? How could she think I was mocking her? Was it because I’d said please? Surely I was *expected* to say please.

She passed me twice more in the next hour, and both times I asked her again, taking care to keep it simple and polite:

“Please may I have a glass of water?”

How could I be putting on airs? I’d never felt so pathetic in my life. It is true you can hear Landed Gentry in my ordinary accent, but I’d never had anybody take *offense* at it before.

That’s their kind, the horrid woman had sneered at my lack of discretion on the floor. *I’ll not be mocked by your kind*. Whose kind? Truant finishing-school girls home for the summer? Did she somehow scent my grandmother’s French blood in me? Had I raved in my sleep about the unchaperoned skiing holiday last winter? Who did she think I was? One of the *tinker folk* whom Mary said had brought me in?

Of course. The headline Mary had quoted from the front page of the *Mercury* explained it all—“Tinker Lass Left for Dead.” The adjectives the nurse had used on me already—*dirty*, *bold*, *sleekit*—were all implied in that one damning word, *tinker*. *Their kind*. Angus Henderson, and the steamroller driver, and the man on the telephone in the hall at Strathfearn House had all used the same words.

The nurse thought I was a Traveller, like the people who brought me here. That’s why she thought I was dirty. That’s why she thought I was indiscreet. That’s why she thought I was making fun of her by putting on airs.

I suppose my bare feet and bare arms and cast-off clothes hadn’t helped my case much when I first arrived.

Whoever they were, the folk who brought me here had gone out of their way to *help* me. They were charitable. They were good and decent

people. No one should be sneering at them.

It made me mad.

At which point I was sitting there seething quite helplessly, when two more visitors came in to see me.

They were a girl and a boy, about my own age. They appeared to be twins. The boy was fully one foot taller than me, and they both had glorious ginger hair like Mary Queen of Scots (or how I imagine Mary Queen of Scots, anyway), and the pale, clear skin to match. The girl walked like the goddess Athena, head high, looking neither left nor right. The boy came in furtively behind her, moving in absolute silence, as though with every step he was expecting to be shouted at to leave. There were curtained screens at the foot of some of the beds in the ward, and he stepped cautiously between them, not daring to catch the eye of any of the other patients. Both the girl and the boy wore much-mended clothes, patched at the elbows and let down at the hems. The girl had a small closed basket like Granddad's fisherman's creel slung on a strap over her shoulder.

She stopped next to my bed. She fixed me with stony eyes the dark blue of descending storm clouds, and continued to hold my gaze while she beckoned her brother with a toss of her head. He came to stand next to her, saw consciousness in my face, and smiled.

"Well now, Davie Balfour!" he said warmly.

Even if I did once spend three months demanding that everyone in the household call me Davie (they might have been more indulgent if it had not also been my oldest brother's name), I don't expect to be recognized when I'm in drag as one of my favorite literary obsessions. Astonishment and joy made me want to laugh, only I couldn't because my head still felt like it was being gently but methodically drubbed with a mallet. I tried weakly to manage a responsive grin.

"You're awake," the girl observed.

"Only just," I said.

The boy padded silently to my side and knelt there. "Better than you were. We came again later after we brought you, the first day, to see if you'd wakened yet. We came yesterday, too, and you were still away wi' the fairies."

"What happened to me? Do you know what happened to me?"

He shook his head.

"Do you not know yourself?" the girl asked coolly from the foot of my bed.

"Who are you?" I asked. She was so self-assured, so *queenly*, that I thought I ought to recognize her, and I was worried she would be offended that I didn't.

"We found you," she answered.

They were the dirty, bold, sleekit tinkers.

They were not dirty, did not appear to be all that bold, and it

remained to be seen how sneaky they were. In fact I was floored by the girl's beauty. She was quite Mary Kinnaird's opposite: no kindness in her face at all, but, oh, what loveliness of form in everything about her—tall and lithe with the long legs of a ballet dancer, a tiny v of ivory showing between her collarbones just above the top button of her blue-and-green gingham blouse, and her long hair like a flaming cloud spilling down her shoulders. Could possibly Mary feel like this, looking at *me*, this mixture of worship and envy?

"I found you lying on the path that leads from the burn up to Inchfort Field, wearing a lad's kilt, your hair and tam all matted with blood," said the boy. "You started up and told me your name was Davie Balfour, then tumbled over out cold on your face at my feet. So I carried you to our camping place. When you slept on, my mam tucked you in with my sister for the night. And then the next day when you *still* didn't wake we brought you here in our cousin's van."

I couldn't believe I'd spent a night sleeping beside that goddess-like creature and didn't remember her.

She was still gazing down at me with the cold stare of an intrigued scientist. "What's your real name?" she asked.

I was faintly, irrationally disappointed.

"You don't believe I'm David Balfour?"

The boy gave a comical grimace and shook his head. "Nor did I believe you the first time, either," he said. "But then you fell over before you could change your story."

I decided to change my story a *little*. I was wary of being accused again of putting on airs and really didn't want to make the wrong impression.

"I'm Julie Stuart."

Julie Stuart *is* my name. Just not all of it.

"How are you the day?" the boy asked, with genuine concern.

"Shipshape, I suppose," I said. "I would sell my soul for a glass of water."

"*Whisht!*" he said, frowning. "What a way to speak! You would never."

His imperial sister eyed me coolly. "You talk like gentry," she accused.

Her tone rang alarm bells in my head. She sounded like the miserable nurse. I'd never had anyone hold my accent against me before that day.

"I'm a filthy sleekit tinker lass who doesnae deserve a glass of water," I told her.

Neither of them answered right away. The girl and I stared at each other in sudden hostility, like cats about to fight.

Then: "Who says?" she challenged.

"Everyone on this floor says!" I glanced at the lump in the next bed—every fiber of her being and all her bedclothes appeared to be listening.

And then, with a deep breath and in spite of the villainous headache, I changed how I was talking. Because I can.

I grew up sharing my summers with Travellers. The Perthshire Stewarts, when they are up in Aberdeenshire, are old friends of my father's, who is a Stuart...likely we are all related regardless of the Gallic spelling of our name. They come every year to Craig Castle, my real home, and camp there. They come in July to thin the turnips, and they come back in October for the tatties. I can give you an earful in the peculiar patois code they call "cant." The Stewarts laugh at me for trying, but it makes them think twice about me.

I said to my visitors now, "If you brought me here, I'm likely one of *your kind*, aye? If I'm bingin' wi' nawkens, I am no barry scaldy dilly."

For the first time, the girl at the foot of my bed looked away from me. She and her brother exchanged sharp, unspoken glances of warning and caution. I'd shaken her. I felt better.

The boy said abruptly, "Now you do sound like a Stewart."

My turn to be shaken. That was canny.

"I *am* a Stuart," I said rebelliously.

The girl made a dismissive little sigh, as if she were growing bored. "You're not one of those Highland Gaelic-speaking folk—who are you really?"

I was still mad. I was a bit mad at everything, now. I rubbed my temples. I countered fiercely, "I told you my name! I told you *two* names. Who are *you*?"

"My real name?" The boy grinned.

"Any old name!"

The girl spoke for him. "He's called Euan McEwen."

"She's Ellen," Euan said.

Ellen suddenly gasped and laughed. "I ken who you are! You're Strathfearn's granddaughter. Julie Stuart, is it? Och aye, Lady Julia! Well then, Lady Julia, tell me—why don't you deserve a glass of water?"

It was like playing tennis, and we'd each won a point. We stared hard at each other. She wasn't angry with me. She really wanted to know.

"The nurses don't know who I am," I said. "They think I'm one of you because you brought me here. One of them thought I was poking fun at her because of the way I talk."

Euan stood up. He padded silently to the foot of my bed, where he peered up and down the ward as if he expected the police to come along and arrest him. Finally he crept deliberately to the other end of the floor. Ellen and I watched, she standing with her arms folded and me leaning up on my elbows against my pillow. Euan picked up a glass from a tray next to someone's bed—I saw him nodding in a friendly way as he spoke a quiet word or two to the bed's occupant, and nobody seemed to object. Then he went to the back wall where there were worktops and a basin with running water, and he came back with the glass full.

It was such a simple kindness.

I drank like a person rescued from dying in a desert. I was absolutely parched. When I'd finished he took the glass and went to fill it up again.

He filled it three times for me, but I couldn't drink the third. Ellen watched indifferently. Euan sat back on his heels by my bed, holding the glass. "Better?" he asked.

I nodded. "Thank you."

"Nae bother."

Ellen beckoned her brother with another nod of her head. "We'd best be off. You'll have everyone's attention the now, Euan, after parading up and down the ward like a soldier. And that librarian might come back."

I found I didn't want them to leave. "Oh, at least do stay until she comes! Mary won't mind if you're here—"

"You think?" Ellen gave a quiet little snort of scorn. "I'm not staying for the librarian."

"But—"

I'd somehow managed to tap into a wellspring of intolerance I hadn't at all expected from the McEwens.

"I hate that librarian!" Ellen vowed vehemently. "*Shaness!* She doesn't speak to you if you greet her. She stares and then she turns her back. You always feel she's laying a curse on you."

Euan picked up where Ellen left off. "She carries a gun. She shoots into the night if she hears so much as a twig snap!"

"She can't hear a twig snap," I said. "She's mostly deaf. It would have to be a thundering great tree limb falling before she'd hear it! I bet that's why she doesn't return your greeting, either. If you were a young lady living all by yourself on an island in a burn in the middle of a wood, I bet you'd carry a gun, too!"

"She's skittery as a haunt," said Ellen. "She looks like a goblin. God pity her."

Now this was making me cross.

"She has a medical thing. She was born with it. It's called—" My brain stretched. Yes, it still worked. "Traacher Collins syndrome," I pronounced triumphantly. My elder brother Sandy had explained it to me. "The bones in her head didn't get made properly before she was born. That's why her face is so peculiar. And why she can't hear. She is the kindest person I know."

"Not to 'filthy tinker folk' she isn't," said Ellen. "*Every year* when she sees Dad fishing in the burn for pearls she calls out the river watcher after him. She doesn't even speak to Dad, just rings for the law straightaway. She knows full well he's not after salmon and that he has a right to be there. Sergeant Henderson puts up with him because they were both in the Black Watch together during the war, but *every year* when we come back she makes out like she's never seen our dad before. Last year he thought he'd knock at the library door, polite, to warn her,

and she told him it was Council land and he'd no right of way to cross the Inverfearnie Island bridges. She threatened him with her shotgun! And—"

Euan took over the story. "And this year, Ellen went and borrowed a book from the library. She wore a tweed skirt and the librarian thought she was country hantle from Brig O'Fearn village. But when the librarian realized after a bit that Ellen was a Traveller lass, didn't she ring the hornies straightaway *again*! She sent a policeman out to us to collect a *library book*."

"What was the book?" I asked.

Ellen was silent for a moment.

"Last year's *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*."

Somehow even *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* sounded like a challenge when those words got spat out by Ellen McEwen.

My brother Sandy, who is a curator at the British Museum in London, has got an article published in that volume. I wondered what Ellen wanted it for.

At this dreadful moment the officious nurse came back.

"*What* is going on here?" she thundered.

And then she asked me what the blazes I thought I was doing, helping myself to the King's own medical equipment, and how dare I. I told her the King didn't own the city's supply of drinking water, which I am not sure is technically true, but it is the principle of the thing—you can't expect public infirmary patients not to drink. She accused me of cheek and of putting on airs again. Then she directed her venomous gaze on my visitors.

Euan, still holding the drinking glass, turned magenta and shrank into his brown garments in fear and embarrassment under her blazing ire; Ellen blanched and stood fast with her arms crossed over her chest, gripping her sleeves.

"*And what do you mean by bringing these creatures into the women's ward?*" the nurse bellowed at me. "*How dare you keep your meetings here, you dirty fast wee midden!*"

With that, she seized the glass from the quivering hand of Euan McEwen and dashed the last unconsumed stolen King's water straight into his blushing face. For a moment he knelt by my bedside absolutely and damply astonished.

"*Get out!*" the nurse raged at him. She swung round to face Ellen, who was holding herself so tightly she'd torn a hole in the thin fabric of one sleeve. I thought Ellen was going to explode with rage.

But she didn't. She stepped past the nurse without a word, and wiped Euan's face with the back of one hand. He stood up. Together they walked with dignity back the way they'd come in, with every patient watching the show. Euan held the door for his sister.

She hesitated. Then she turned around and called to me defiantly, "We're away to Blairgowrie for the berry picking. We'll be back at the Strathfearn estate for the flax at Bridge Farm. Get well and come see us at Inchfort Field!"

"*I will!*" I vowed to her from across the ward.

My mother arrived eventually, but I was asleep again by then and she did not want to waken me. She arranged for my discharge the following morning, and I was assigned a different nurse for the duration of my stay. The ward sister in charge was extremely grovelly and apologetic for her subordinate's behavior, concerned when I couldn't bear to finish my breakfast porridge and calling me "Lady Julia." I used my newfound power to demand coffee, but couldn't finish that, either.

I left St. John's on a spring tide of obsequious kowtowing. The noted surgeon who had last year coaxed an extra five months of life out of my dying and bedridden grandfather came out to the car to see me off.

(It was my mother's little two-seater Magnette which she drives herself—Granddad's landaulet had already been sold and the driver dismissed. Mother's car is a cracking red sporty thing with glittering chrome knobs all over, and it is utterly impractical, apart from her occasionally giving me a driving lesson in it when she is in one of her more Bolshevik moods. Driving like a man is one of her few foibles.)

The surgeon held the door while Mother tucked me in with pillows and a blanket, as the car has no top. "Lady Craigie, I do apologize your daughter wasn't given a private room."

"Of course you couldn't have known who she was!" Mother said. "How lucky we are that the Travellers were so kind to her. That was Jean McEwen and her folk, wasn't it? To think Jean and I used to play together along the Fearn! It's my own fault she's never met my daughter and couldn't recognize her!"

She didn't say, *You can't be blamed for the occasional small-minded pigheaded idiot turning up on your nursing staff—it is hard to cure people of ingrained cultural platitudes.* But I knew that, like me, she was thinking it hard.

And like her, I didn't say anything. I was sheerly grateful that the headache had subsided, and that I was out of the newspaper nightgown. Mother had brought me sensible clothes of her own (my trunk *still* had not arrived). I dared to ask, "Can I drive?"

"Do not be *ridiculous*, Julia." But she laughed.

As we headed out of Perth on the Edinburgh Road I shook off the blanket and managed to kneel backward on the seat sticking half my body out of the car like a dog, enjoying the fingers of wind rumpling the tufts of leftover hair.

"Darling, I cannot bear to watch," Mother shouted.

“Slow down, then, Mummy! You’re supposed to be watching the road, not me.”

The concentration it took to hold myself up made me seasick again, however, so I was forced to behave myself and sit properly.

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3. *Les liaisons dangereuses*

My grandmother, the Dowager Countess of Strathfearn, whom my brothers and I call by the French pet name *Mémère*, had been reduced to three rooms in her late husband's ancestral mansion—four if you counted the bathroom. (Not the nursery bathroom—it gave everyone vapors to think I was lounging blissfully unclothed in that enormous bathtub, which was also used by the workmen in the east wing.) Four little iron beds had been brought down to *Mémère*'s big bedroom from the abandoned staff rooms in the attic; two of these beds had been installed side by side in *Mémère*'s dressing room for Mother and Solange with just enough room to walk between them, and another was lined up at the foot of *Mémère*'s four-poster for her lady's companion, Colette. Mine was shoved against *Mémère*'s tall French windows. This was really the nicest place to be because I got to decide for myself whether the windows were open or shut. Also we still had the little morning room downstairs to ourselves, with big notices saying NO ENTRY posted on the terrace and in the corridor to keep the workmen out. We had use of the kitchen, but so did everybody else.

For my first two days out of hospital, I couldn't go downstairs to the morning room anyway. Standing at the top of the stairs was like being on the edge of a sea cliff, only worse—the vertigo actually made me want to be sick. I had to sit down on the top stair with my head between my knees before I managed to creep back to bed. The days that followed were *interminable*. I couldn't do anything—I couldn't focus my mind sharply enough to do a crossword or read or even be read to, though Mother and Solange and Mary Kinnaird all did try.

Solange also fussed with my hair and filled my surroundings with roses, and brought me tall drinks full of mint leaves and lemon peel. Eventually I wanted to strangle her. I'd never known her to be so nervous.

"Please go away, Nanny, I don't *want* to be read to," I told her petulantly, a small child all over again with my grown-up self-sufficiency completely destroyed, and felt instantly, hideously guilty as she tiptoed out of the room to continue her never-ending quest for something to distract me with.

Bored nearly to weeping, I sat at my grandmother's dressing table—used by all four of the older women in turn each morning, very quietly so as not to awaken me unnecessarily—and I methodically removed and replaced the lids of every single jar of cold cream and face powder again and again. There was something mesmerizing and comforting about this,

possibly because it proved to me that I was still able to coordinate my brain with my body. The clink of the glass stoppers in Solange's scent bottles was as soothing as birdsong. Nosy, idle, with the prying right of an indulged and pampered baby, I was delighted to find a jewel case from MacGregor's of Perth pushed against the mirror stand at the back corner of the table.

"Mémère, has *all* your jewelry been sold?" I asked my grandmother wistfully, in French, because although she'd been living in Scotland for over fifty years, she and Colette and Solange are all French-born and ordinarily we all chatter to each other in their native language.

"The Murray jewelry has been gone for years," Mémère said dismissively, as if she'd never liked it anyway. She and Colette were sitting at opposite sides of an octagonal card table covered with green baize, folding about a million lace-edged napkins and packing them into an enormous woven willow hamper. "What's left of my own jewels is locked up in my great-grandfather's sea chest over there, beneath still more of my mother's linen. There's too much of *that*." My grandmother tossed another pile of napkins unceremoniously into the basket.

I pried open the jewel box I'd found, as if it were a mussel shell. Inside it lay a pair of pearl earrings. They were tear-shaped Scottish river pearls like gray raindrops, like a sky heavy with cloud, perfectly matched.

"Whose are these, then?"

I unfastened one earring from its blue silk bed and tried to dangle it from my ear.

"*Julia!*"

That was Mother. All in an instant, she and Solange were both hovering over me like crows mobbing a thieving magpie. When I lowered my hands, Solange tweaked the little jewel away from me as though she thought I were about to pop it in my mouth and choke myself to death.

"Are these pearls from the Murray Hoard?" I asked.

"They belong to Solange," my grandmother said, shrugging. "They were a gift."

Solange packed them smartly back into their case.

This circumnavigation of my question did nothing to slake my curiosity.

"Who—?"

My mother and my nanny exchanged sharp looks over my head.

"She's old enough to know," Mother said. "She *should* know."

"You may tell her, Madame," Solange said miserably.

"You must do the telling," Mother said coolly. "I won't speak for you."

Solange, the jewel case still held between her hands—one on top of the other—walked to the tall French windows and sat down on my narrow bed, as far away as she could get from the rest of us, and gazed

out over the tractors and wheelbarrows bumping back and forth over the lawn. She sat quietly for a moment, steeling herself. She took so long to continue that I found myself holding my own breath in apprehension, and let it out sharply when all of a sudden she began to speak.

"I have made the acquaintance of a special friend," Solange said carefully. "An *intimate* friend."

She was still speaking French, and the euphemism "special friend" didn't sound as coy as it does in English. *En français* it is quite ordinary to call your sweetheart your "*bon ami*," your good friend.

"He is called Dr. Hugh Housman," my grandmother expanded drily on Solange's behalf. "He is the scholar who has been cataloging the Murray Collection of antiquities."

"I thought Mary Kinnaird was doing that at the Inverfearnie library," I said.

Mother corrected gently, "It's being done at the library because everything is so chaotic here. There's room to spread things out there in peace and quiet. But it's Dr. Housman's work, not Mary Kinnaird's."

Solange, distracted, now didn't go on. Colette bent in embarrassment over the old linen. After another agonizing long moment of silence, Mother and Mémère in unison gave little cat sighs, a sharp sniff that always indicates either one of them is losing patience with you, and Solange started talking again all in a rush.

"Something has happened to him. I *think*. It was the day you hit your head, Julia. I argued with him—bitterly, *bitterly*—the same morning. I refused his—I refused his affections—and then I watched him from *this very window* as he crossed the lawn and entered the wood where the river path is, but I had locked myself in this room and did not come out again until your lady mother and your grandmother returned from the solicitor's that afternoon—"

Here Mother did interrupt.

"Jean McEwen's man found Dr. Housman's cap in the river not far from the standing stone that very afternoon. None of us has seen him since."

Dear Solange—what cracking melodrama! No wonder she seemed so skittish. I rubbed at my temples.

"He gave you those earrings?" I queried.

"We'd been very intimate," Solange sniffed. "He found the pearls himself—"

"From the cup in the Murray Hoard? Granddad used to have a pile of pearls in that wood-and-silver cup in his artifact collection," I interrupted.

All the older women looked at me strangely.

"I don't remember that," said Mother.

"Dr. Housman found Solange's pearls in the river," Mémère explained. "Fishing for pearls is a hobby. He was a colleague of your grandfather's,

and interested in many of the same things.”

Mother sat down again in the overstuffed wing chair where she'd been curled for most of the morning. “Dr. Housman was an admirer of your grandfather's antiquarian and archaeological work,” she explained. “That's why your grandmother recommended he be the one to catalog the artifacts you call the Murray Hoard.”

“So Granddad and this Housman chap both collected pearls?”

“Goodness, Julia, do stop going on about pearls,” Mémère said crossly. “I told you the jewelry was sold.”

Mother was gentler. “We are quite concerned for Dr. Housman. And more so for *you*: What happened to you that morning? Did you slip and fall, or did someone hit you? Did you and Dr. Housman cross paths, perhaps without seeing each other? I'm anxious to ask *him* if he saw what happened to *you*. But I'm increasingly concerned that someone else attacked *both* of you—a poacher, perhaps—and Housman didn't have the narrow escape you did.”

I tried to shift my mind from Granddad's pearls, which I remembered, to Dr. Hugh Housman, whom I'd never heard of, and it was like trying to play the trumpet without knowing which end you were supposed to blow into. Colette looked disapproving. Mother and Mémère and Solange all leaned forward breathlessly, expectant.

“Was this Housman chap staying here?” I asked. “Isn't there anyone he reports to you could ask about him?”

Solange gave a sniff. Obviously she felt he ought to be reporting to *her*.

“He reports to the solicitors of the Murray Estate in Edinburgh,” Mémère said. “And his people at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.”

“But no one seems to have any idea where he is.” Solange sniffed again.

As before, the most useful information came from Mother. “And his job isn't being done. I've put a call through to Sandy to see if he can take over the archaeological catalog until—” My mother, the resolute Lady Craigie, couldn't work out how to best finish her thought without sounding ominous—she couldn't say *until Professor Housman comes back* if he wasn't going to, or if he was going to be fired when he did. She fumbled: “Sandy can do an adequate job as long as he's needed. He'd love to do it. The Murray Estate felt he wasn't experienced enough, as well as having an interest in the estate. But he's the new Earl of Strathfearn—it's *right* he do it. Mary can help him, just as she's been helping Dr. Housman.”

Mother took a deep breath and soldiered on. “We've notified the police about Dr. Housman's absence as well, and they've been talking to the builders on the estate here. I'm surprised the chief contractor for the Glenfearn School hasn't seen him. Solange, you said that Dr. Housman and the contractor, Mr. Dunbar, sometimes share their meals—”

“What about Mary?” I interrupted. “Wouldn’t this Housman fellow normally ring the library, or leave her a note to say when he’s coming and going?”

“Julia, please do wait until I’ve finished speaking,” Mother corrected automatically. She is used to running her own household and likes to have everyone’s full attention.

I shrugged. There was a silence.

“Well?”

“I spoke to Mary this morning. She hasn’t noticed anything unusual at the library, except that Housman had left her back door open on the day you arrived. But he doesn’t always work at the Inverfearnie Library; some days he’s here, or in Perth, or even at the National Library in Edinburgh, so Mary didn’t think anything was amiss until I mentioned it to her.”

“He might have left her a note. I did.”

“She hasn’t found one. That leaves Solange as the last person who communicated with him. She’d been putting fresh roses in his room, and went up earlier today to change them; she didn’t see anything that suggested he’d slept there.”

Poor Solange gave another miserable sniff. “But he hadn’t taken anything away with him, either, Madame! It was the same as always. Oh, how can I speak to the project manager—to Mr. Dunbar—about Dr. Housman? How can I admit I go in and out of his *bedroom*? It would not be *correct*.”

“Well, I can speak to the project manager. I’ll go ask him now. I don’t like it that Julia should be mixed up in something as nasty as this. The man might have been *murdered*.”

Mother got up again, with an air of determination.

“Perhaps I’m a witness!” I said, relishing the idea.

No one else relished it.

“Everything is so unpleasant,” Mémère said unhappily. “I detest having policemen in my house. And they stop at nothing. They will question Julia. What a thing for the front page of the *Mercury*.”

I laughed, improvising an appropriate headline. “Injured Tinker Lass Saw Nobody.”

This time Mother scolded swiftly in a tone of iron: “*Julia*.”

Her voice was low and sharp. “Just because you can’t remember what happened doesn’t mean you had any less of a narrow escape! And don’t you dare forget that the Beauforts have been raked through muck before. Your grandmother had to fend off a household full of policemen after her sister’s husband died, and it’s an invasion not to be borne when someone you love has lost a battle against cancer. *Not more than once*. It may be that it was in France and it was before you were born, but that should not make you too young to understand nor care.”

And I was ashamed of being so callow and thoughtless. I looked over

at my grandmother, sitting frail and unhappy and bravely elegant in her slim Murray tartan skirt, with her white hair coiled so that not a strand was out of place, and I wanted to *be* like her, moving into a terrible unknown future without showing any fear; also I wanted to leap up and run to her to take her in my arms, but I still wasn't able to make any sudden moves, and I was too craven to displace my equilibrium.

I bit my lip. "Mémère. I do understand. I'm sorry."

"It's not a game," said my mother. "If you ever remember anything that happened to you that day, you might really be a witness."

She added as she got to the door, "Do try to be kind to your grandmother, Julia, darling. And to Solange. And don't toy with those pearls!"

I could see why Mémère would have put Granddad's pearls out of her head—out of sight, out of mind—but it irritated me that *Mother* didn't remember them. Granddad had said they were his *mother's mother's mother's*. How could everyone have just *forgotten* about them like this?

I tried to rationalize it. My mother grew up in Strathfearn House: perhaps she wasn't fascinated by the little tower room museum the way my brothers and I were. It had been her father's private place and she wasn't allowed in on her own. I, on the other hand, had been his spoilt only granddaughter. How strange it is that everybody remembers things so *differently*.

I wondered what had happened to those pearls.

On the third day after my release I was able to make it down the stairs to the little morning room. This cheered everybody up very much, so much so that they finally dared press on cautiously with their administrative tasks. Solange was hopelessly gloomy, which was having its effect on me as well, so Mother insisted that Solange come out with her and Mémère, and they left me alone with Colette while the rest of them visited the offices of Sweet's in Perth with an eye to arranging the auction of the Strathfearn House furnishings. The Murray Hoard was to be auctioned separately by one of the big London houses. Mother said the most valuable pieces in it were potentially of National Interest.

"Mary Queen of Scots' bracelet?" I asked.

"The Glenfearn School trustees are going to allow that to stay in the Inverfearnie Library."

I was glad of that, even if it wasn't ours anymore.

Clad in a blue serge skirt belonging to my mother, wearing the remaining wisps of hair teased back over my forehead with a steel hairgrip (put there by Solange trying to work a miracle, probably with more success than I credited her for—she is a creature of taste and elegance), I sat in the morning room with the doors to the terrace open because the air was nice, trying to pull my brain back together. I felt a

great deal better. But I couldn't manage words on a page yet. I couldn't read. I thought maybe I could write. I ended up doodling.



a jam jar



spectacles

I wasn't happy about the lid of my jam jar—I couldn't decide what I wanted it to look like. The picture in my *head* was fuzzy. And I stared at the specs for the longest time trying to figure out what was wrong with them.

Someone knocked at the door to the passage, and I jumped and dropped my pen. I was the only one in the room, as a few minutes ago I'd managed to convince Colette that it would be all right to put down her endless knitting of winter stockings and leave me alone for the time it took to go and fix us some tea and sandwiches for lunch. Colette is fully ten years younger than my recently widowed grandmother, so only sixty-nine, but she is much more of an old woman, all timid fuss and flutter. No matter how strenuous the task, Mémère usually insists, "I could if I had to." But it always takes a firm hand to stop Colette fretting, and she was reluctant to leave me alone.

Now her worst fears were realized, ha-hah! At the sound of the knock a false feeling of wild freedom swept over me. I realized it could be the first time since the day of my injury that I'd had any whiff of contact with the outside world, and I got up to open the door full of eager anticipation, hoping vaguely it was going to be somebody I'd never seen before with a special problem that only I would be able to solve.

Well, it was only a little problem—but *such* a somebody I'd never seen before.

I opened the door and found myself facing the most splendidly attractive man I had ever met. It is true I am not terribly experienced, but he had all the devil-may-care athleticism of a certain ski instructor my school chums all swooned over last winter, coupled with considerably more age and sense, which I liked. Clean-shaven, in smart office clothes but without his jacket and with his tie and collar loose, he looked as if he'd spent the morning trying to work and being constantly interrupted. His hair was brown and wavy and threaded with silver, as if someone had lightly sprinkled Christmas tinsel over it. He was so much taller than me I had to tilt my head back a little to look at his face. That made me feel rather childish, so I stepped away from him.

He stepped away from me as well, backing a foot or two into the corridor. He opened his mouth as if he'd been about to say something

and made a mistake, then shut it. For a moment I thought he was going to dash off in the other direction.

I made a guess about who he might be.

“Dr. Housman?”

“I—*no!*” he said explosively. Then pulling himself together very suddenly, he offered a hand for me to shake. “Miss Murray?” he addressed me.

Unfortunately this made me laugh. I am acquiring aliases by the barrowload! Of course Alexander Murray is my *maternal* grandfather, so even though I consider myself a Murray, it is not my name.

Unoffended by my laughter, he still held out the offered hand, and I took it. His clasp was firm and warm and strong. He held on a moment longer than I expected him to, gazing down at me assessingly, and I waited for him to let go first, not wanting to show any signs of backing away again. His eyes were the gray-green of a winter sea.

“Is it Miss Murray?” he asked, and then, without waiting for an answer, he introduced himself, a bit nervously. “I’m Francis Dunbar. I’m the chief contractor for the building work that’s to be done to Strathfearn House on behalf of the Glenfearn School.” He let go of me and quickly put his hands in his pockets, as if he were banishing them in disgrace for being so forward. “I organized the recent alterations to this house, the ramps and handrails, for the late Earl of Strathfearn, and his widow—” He hesitated, then added, “That’s your grandmother, I believe? She recommended me to the Glenfearn School trustees to manage the current renovation.”

I should have corrected my name *straightaway*, but no, I was so smitten with his physical beauty and his communist approach to speaking to me as his equal that I just launched into conversation with him. He appeared to have forgotten why he was here, and seemed to need prodding.

“Can I help you with something?” I inquired politely.

“Oh! Yes. I’ve been trying for weeks to get the terrace doors in my office to open. The heat is asphyxiating in the morning when the sun’s shining in. It’s the room adjoining this one. I—I hoped that someone who knows the house better than I do might help! Is there a trick?”

“Probably,” I said cheerfully, hoping he’d let me do it myself rather than change his mind and wait for one of the adults to come back. “Shall I come through and see?” I was charmed by the vulnerability of a “chief contractor” who couldn’t figure out how to open his office windows.

“Thank you.”

He gestured me politely ahead of him down the passage with an open hand. His office was a twin to the morning room, a mirror image, the two being divided by a partition of oak panels that folded up like an accordion to make it into one large reception space opening onto the terrace above the lawn. Francis Dunbar crossed to the French doors of his

half of the twin rooms and twitched back the heavy curtains in irritation, trying to let in more light through smudged glass panes that hadn't been opened or cleaned for a good long while.

"Sorry about the dust in here," he said. "This room was closed off for some time when I took it over in May."

That must have been barely a month after my grandfather's funeral. I didn't want to create more awkwardness by mentioning how quickly the property had been sold; I just launched into an attack on the doors.

"There's a third catch—bolts at top and bottom and then others there between the panels—" I pointed; I couldn't reach the upper catch. In the morning room next door we never bothered to fasten it. I stood back so Mr. Dunbar could get at the high bolts himself, again self-consciously aware of the difference in our height and how young it could make me look if I drew attention to it.

"Ah!" He threw the hidden bolt. Light and air flooded into the room, as it did next door. Francis Dunbar put his hands in his pockets again, gazing out over the disrupted and busy lawn for a moment, then turned to look at me standing there, frail and boyish with my chopped hair, wearing my mother's serge. His face was a little shadowed; mine was in the light. I considered how to prolong the moment. He did it for me, taking a hand out of a pocket and holding out his cigarette case to me. "I should have offered earlier," he said.

My heart swooped. He hadn't taken me for a child.

Probably I ought to have refused, having only on *one occasion* let tobacco pass my lips, on that same highly educational skiing holiday last winter. But I'd learned to make smoking look natural by the end of that evening, and now I just couldn't resist being treated with such sophistication. Also, Francis Dunbar was so very beautiful, and I liked him, and I wanted to see how much I could get away with. I was beginning to *hate* being treated like porcelain.

I took a cigarette and let him light it.

That is a terrifically intimate thing, you know? Letting a stranger light your cigarette. Leaning forward so he can hold a flame to your lips. Pausing to breathe in before you pull back again.

It was *so good* to be flirting with someone a little, and to feel more like myself again.

Thank goodness Colette wasn't around. I wondered how much time I had.

I stood back carefully, trying to keep the cigarette casual. *Don't think about it too hard, Julie.*

Francis Dunbar lit his own cigarette. He flicked the match into a curious carved soapstone ashtray on his desk, turning away from me. He drew a long, slow, contemplative breath on the cigarette before he turned to me again and said, "Thanks for your help, Miss Murray—I'm sorry. You're Strathfearn's granddaughter—Julia? Should I be saying

Lady Julia?"

"Julie. Julie Beaufort-Stuart. Lady Julia is correct, or Miss Beaufort-Stuart, but my name's not Murray. Murray is my mother's maiden name—Beaufort-Murray, actually. We keep the Beaufort. That's from my grandmother, the Dowager Countess of Strathfearn. She was Juliette Beaufort. She's French."

He continued to gaze at me intently. I felt like a boring little animated edition of *Debrett's Peerage*. I said, "It's all right for you to call me Julie."

He shook his head—not saying no, exactly, but with an expression of bemusement, as if he couldn't believe his luck. "Only in this office," he agreed. "And only if you'll call me Frank."

"Oh. Should I?" I nodded, thinking about it. Then I repeated it, trying it out. "Frank." I gave him a little crooked smile. It was like tasting an alcoholic drink—and more intimate than the lighting of a cigarette. I hadn't realized that using his given name—his nickname, even—would be more daring than giving him mine.

I probably didn't have any longer with him than the time it took to smoke the illicit cigarette. I gazed at the disorder of his office, trying to discover a little more about him. There was the curious ashtray; and he'd got what looked like a miniature Parcheesi game board over on a back corner of his desk, shell playing pieces in place on dark and polished wood with intricate paisley designs set into it. Propped on the fixed shelves against the wall, along with piles of paper and bottles of ink, was a framed display of medals and service ribbons.

He wouldn't have those there unless he were proud of them. He'd had to bring them with him from wherever he normally worked.

"You did your training in the military?" I asked. "In India?"

He stared at me, startled. I pointed at the souvenirs, and the medals behind him. "Good God, I took you for a clairvoyant!" he exclaimed.

"Just nosy." I laughed.

"Canny, though! Yes, I was an officer and an engineer in India with the Black Watch all through my twenties. It's only been three years since I've been back, but it feels very far away now."

"You weren't in the Black Watch at the same time as Angus Henderson, were you? The Strathfearn Water Bailiff marched with them in the Great War."

"Have the tropics aged me so much?" Frank Dunbar exclaimed, running a distraught hand through his silvershot hair. "I was in primary school when the Great War started!"

Now we both laughed. Oh, I loved this game. I was trying to make myself look older, he trying to make himself look younger. I'd played this all the way across Europe, and I'd got *good* at it. I felt it was safest to add only two years to my age instead of three this time.

"Well, you've my sympathies. I won't be eighteen until August, but it's dreadful what they did to my hair in the hospital. It makes me look

like I've only just finished primary school."

Take that.

And then among the piles of paper on his desk I was startled to see something I recognized.

It was the brown envelope on which I'd written my note to Mary. It was facedown so that the engraved return address was showing, and I realized that of course Francis Dunbar couldn't possibly have any reason to be interested in my note to Mary. It was the scholar at the Ashmolean Museum he must have been trying to track down.

My rattled brain, focused on navigating stairs and the state of my hair, had shoved the missing Dr. Hugh Housman aside. But Mother had started to say that "the contractor Mr. Dunbar" shared his meals with Dr. Housman, so I did exactly what Frank had just done, and used a slow drag on the cigarette to give me time to think.

I suddenly had a lot of questions I wanted to ask him, and I'd already confessed I was nosy. Also, if Colette came back and I was sitting there in the sun, she might think I'd wandered in here out of boredom and be more forgiving of Frank Dunbar than if she thought he'd lured me into his office himself.

"Do you mind if I sit down?" I said, waving my cigarette in the direction of his leather armchair.

"Oh—please do. I should have offered." He scurried to pull the chair forward for me so I could sit in it and reach the ashtray on his desk. "I'm a terrible bachelor and I forget how to be polite sometimes. And you—you're only just out of hospital. I'm so sorry."

The contrite sincerity in his voice made me a bit embarrassed. I really hadn't been meaning to play the fragile convalescent. I arranged myself on the edge of the chair, knees and feet tucked together demurely. Better not give Colette anything to worry about if she *did* find me here. I thought I could get rid of the damning cigarette pretty quickly.

"Are you actually living here?" I asked.

"Aye, in one of the guestrooms in the east wing."

"Is that where the visiting scholar stays, too?"

"Dr. Housman? Yes. But you've—you've never met him yourself, have you? You called me Housman when you answered the door."

"He's supposed to be cataloging my grandfather's archeological collection," I said. "No, I've never met him. But my—my mother is worried about him because no one's seen him for the past week. She was going to ask you if you know where he's been."

Frank shook his head. I didn't know if he meant he didn't know where Housman was, or if my mother hadn't asked, or if he couldn't say anything because his mouth was full of smoke.

"I *am* just being nosy. I don't know a thing about him," I confessed. "But look—"

I reached across the desk and picked up the envelope with Housman's

name engraved on the back, and flipped it over.

"This is the note I left for Mary Kinnaird on the morning I arrived here," I said. "It startled me to see it on your desk."

"You *are* canny," he said again, breathing out. "That's got Housman's work address in Oxford on it. I couldn't find anything in his room; all his paperwork is over at the library. Miss Kinnaird passed this on to me so I could write to his people at the museum where he's employed. And they've given me the address of a sister—his...well, this is unpleasant, but she's his next of kin. Your mother and the police—at least, the Strathfearn Water Bailiff—came to see me. They were both hoping I might have seen Dr. Housman this week! But his room and mine are at opposite ends of the east wing, so I rarely run into him coming and going. We do sometimes eat together in the evening. I have so much space in this office, and he likes to talk; he gets excited about things—he's excited about—"

Here Dunbar checked himself and took a drag on his cigarette. Then he laughed.

"He thinks your grandfather's Bronze and Iron Age assemblies of spear tips and arrowheads are exceptional—'of British Museum-level importance to typological dating,' he said. He's a man who loves his work. It made me a little envious, actually." He glanced away, suddenly boyishly and appealingly shy.

"Haven't you *missed* him?" I asked. "If you'd become friends, and you haven't seen him for nearly a week—aren't you lonely?"

The contractor laughed. "With this job?" He waved an arm around him, taking in the pile of blueprints on his desk, the churning cement mixer and wheelbarrowloads of stone which men were hauling up and down the garden, and distant hammering somewhere in the bowels of the house itself. "I'm too busy to get lonely. Sometimes I don't go up to my own room until well past midnight, and Dr. Housman isn't even in this building most of the time."

He paused.

"He might have run into trouble with the Travellers, I suppose."

"They really don't go around causing trouble," I said. "Not any more than anyone else does, anyway. Not on purpose."

Frank was finished with his cigarette. I'd neglected mine for so long it had gone out, and I didn't want to draw attention to my inefficiency by asking him to light it again, so I discreetly stubbed it to pieces. Then I realized I was still holding the brown envelope with Dr. Housman's Oxford address on it, so I stretched out my hand to put it back on Frank's desk.

And a little pearl dropped out into my lap. Frank, still standing, didn't notice it, and neither did I until I looked down.

I thought it dropped off *me* at first—as if I'd been wearing it in my hair, or as an earring! It was the size of a barley grain and perfectly

round. It lay there in the cradle of woolen skirt between my knees. It was beautiful and perfect.

Why was it in that envelope, anyway? Had Granddad sent it to Dr. Housman? Or just put it in there for safe-keeping? Or had Dr. Housman put it there himself—had he found it in the Murray Collection? The last of the Murray pearls?

I picked it up—it was so smooth I had to wedge it beneath my fingernail to get hold of it.

And I remembered.

I remembered leaving the library. I remembered walking to the beachy place in the burn, and lying on the rock there with my arm in the water, and falling asleep. And I remembered the splashing that woke me.

When I opened my eyes there was a man standing in the burn. He hadn't been there when I lay down, but I had been dozing and dreaming and feeling sorry for Mémère for having to leave Strathfearn at the end of the summer, and for Mother, who'd grown up there, and a little sorry for myself perhaps; and I'd been looking up at the sky, and he must have worked his way downstream. The beachy place is at a bend, and you can't see around it when you are lying on the rocks hidden by hazel shoots, like I was.

I looked up and saw him standing over by the tall Drookit Stane in the middle of the stream. He was in water up to his waist. He was bearded, with wiry, whiskery sideburns the exact same horse-chestnut color as the clear river depths. He had a soft wool cap. That's the only thing I remembered about his clothes—not their color, not their pattern, not if they were tweed or tartan or oilcloth. It was his face that startled me most. One eye was swollen shut and his lip was split—fresh red blood oozing beneath his nose. But the reason I noticed his face wasn't because it was so battered but because of how disks of light played over it, dappling his pink, shining skin with moving spangles of brightness, as if someone were sitting on the bank throwing gold coins at his head.

I thought: He's not stealing salmon. He doesn't know what he's doing. He's not *hard* enough to be a poacher.

Then I realized he was fishing for pearls. But he wasn't a proper pearl fisher, either. He had all the kit for pearl fishing—glass-bottomed jug, shoulder satchel, pearl stick—but he carried it awkwardly, as if it were getting in his way—as if he were in costume. He was as ignorant as the man I'd caught with Granddad, but unlike the one who'd pointed the gun at me, this man was *comical*—

He took a deep breath, bent over, and put his battered face in the water for a good long half a minute. Then he stood up, gasped, and did it again. His head went the whole way under. His cap came off, and he splashed about as he tried to grab it back. It drifted away downstream.

I sat up, snickering behind one hand, and dabbled my feet off my rock to watch the show. He looked up when he heard me. We stared at each other in astonishment.

And then the explosion in my head.

“Julie?”

Francis Dunbar was on his knees beside me, holding my hand. The wave of memory had submerged me for a whole minute, while I’d just sat staring and let it all come flooding back. Now I looked down at our hands clasped together, and then at Frank’s face. He wasn’t being forward—he was concerned and, I think, a bit frightened.

“Oh!” I said, pulling my hand back. He let go of it instantly. “I’m sorry—I—”

I knew—there was no question in my mind that the bloodied man I’d seen in the river had been Hugh Housman.

I needed to tell Mother, but I couldn’t share this tremendous strange vision, like a remembered dream, with someone I scarcely knew. Not at that moment.

“It’s my head.” I swallowed. “Every now and then...the headache starts up again and I get dizzy.”

He stood up quickly. “Your maid’s just come back. I’ll go next door and get her.”

“She’s not a maid. She’s my grandmother’s companion.” I stood up. I was fine—physically, I was all right. “She’s been making lunch for me. I’d better go let her know I’m here.”

“Thank you for helping me with the terrace door,” Frank said.

“It was my pleasure,” I answered, smiling up at him as he ushered me out. He was careful not to touch me again.

The pearl was still stuck beneath my fingernail, invisible.

No one knew it was there but me.

This time I thought I’d keep it.

4. *My jangled brain and the yellow dog*

Of course as soon as my returning memory offered up an actual picture of the missing Dr. Hugh Housman, *after* he'd last been seen by anyone else, I was required to add an account of what I knew to the official police report that was being maintained by the Perthshire and Kinross-shire Constabulary.

They sent a person called Inspector Duncan Milne out to Strathfearn House to interview me. They made Frank Dunbar relinquish his office for an hour to accommodate the interview. My *school uniform* was still the most presentable thing I had to wear, and Mother was there to make sure I wore it properly, so it was jolly difficult to take on the persona of a grown and sensible woman. Mother was settled in the leather chair across from Frank's desk when Colette ushered me in; she'd been speaking to Inspector Milne herself. There was another chair waiting for me.

Inspector Milne had a neat beard and thin salt-and-pepper hair cropped short beneath his peaked cap. He was scribbling away at his notes in a tiny cleared rectangle of space on Frank's desk, looking down through reading glasses, and kept scribbling as I hesitated in the doorway. I wondered if it was correct to wait to be told to sit, or if I could just do it without being told, or if being Strathfearn's youngest grandchild put me too far down the pecking order to act so boldly in the presence of authority. I wouldn't have dared sit in my headmistress's office, or a solicitor's or something like that, without being invited to. I glanced at Mother and she shook her head ever so slightly. So I waited.

Inspector Milne didn't look up even when he became aware of me—he just said, at last, “You may sit.”

So I did, feeling a bit foolish, as if what I had to say couldn't possibly be as important as I'd thought it was going to be.

I sat, and waited another while. I noticed that Francis Dunbar kept a pillow and blanket folded under the wing chair Mother was seated in. I thought, Poor Frank must nap here when he's working late.

Eventually Inspector Milne did look up, presumably to make sure it really was me and not an imposter. He didn't change his expression or say hello or ask me how I was getting on after my dunt to the head.

When he did speak, he plunged right in.

“You observed Dr. Housman fishing for pearls in the River Fearn at about midday on the fifteenth of June?”

I answered cautiously, “I don't know if it was him. I don't know him—I'd never seen him before. It could have been *anybody*.”

"Your description does match."

"Oh—thank you," I said ridiculously, as if he'd complimented me.

"Did you speak to him?"

"I don't know." Another ridiculous answer! How could I *not know* what had happened between us? I felt I had to do better—

"I don't think he knew I was there. He didn't look angry or startled. He didn't even look *interested*. I suppose he might be the one who hit me, but—perhaps he saw me fall and hit my head and tried to help me, and got into trouble because he couldn't swim, or slipped and drowned and —"

And then his death would be *my fault*.

I shut up quickly, appalled. *Buckets of blood*. I hadn't considered *that*. If I was the last person to see him alive, I might also be the one who'd killed him.

"I *didn't*. I *couldn't*! Could I? But—"

Of course I couldn't remember anything that had happened. Could I have harmed him somehow? Maybe I *could*. What if he'd attacked me for some reason—perhaps he'd taken me for one of the Travellers that everyone was so suspicious of, and I'd fought back, hit him perhaps, tripped him, made him lose his balance in the river and—What if all this time he'd been dead and it was *my fault*?

"What if you never find him? What if I have to go *all my life* wondering if I killed him? What if I remember that I *did*?"

"Julia, darling, leave the what-iffing to Inspector Milne." Mother suddenly spoke up. "Perhaps Dr. Housman got into trouble himself and *you* tried to help *him* and then slipped and hit your head."

Inspector Duncan Milne shuffled pages. "Those are considerations," he said. "But at the moment..."

He peered at his notes and then looked up at me over the top of his glasses.

"There's no need to jump to conclusions. We've no reason to believe the man is dead. In any case, as your mother, Lady Craigie, has suggested, we think it more likely that you were both assaulted by the same attacker. I'd like to ask you about the young man who brought you to the hospital." He changed tack abruptly. "You know Euan McEwen?"

It took me a moment to remember why I knew the name.

Of course, that was the Traveller lad who'd found me. The one who'd brought me to the hospital; who'd come back every day to see if I'd woken up yet; who'd quietly conjured me a glass of water.

A moment later I remembered Ellen, and my heart surged with pleasure and anticipation at the thought that I might get to meet her again. How could my wandering thoughts have put aside the challenge and mystery that was *Ellen McEwen*? It made me a bit more sympathetic toward my mother for forgetting her ancestral pearls.

I wondered if the Travellers were back at Inchfort Field yet. I

wondered if I was capable of walking there on my own.

“Lady Julia?” Inspector Milne prompted.

“Yes,” I said. “I met Euan when I was in hospital. He came to see me.”

“Why did he visit you there?”

I couldn’t imagine what Euan visiting me in the hospital had to do with *anything*. I exclaimed, “You *just said yourself* you know he found me after I’d hit my head!”

Mother gave a short, sharp sniff, which I knew to be scolding.

The policeman glanced up at me over his glasses again. “Perhaps you’ve remembered something else about your time in the tinkers’ camp, as you were with them for nearly a full day. Young McEwen was known to be out and about on the river that morning. I believe the tinkers fish for pearls as well?”

I don’t know where this man’s suspicious mind was leading him, but I could see he was following a familiar map. Frank had suggested the same thing. Maybe the tinker lad had attacked the scholar. Or fought with him. Or surprised him. Maybe the boy was a thief, stealing shells or pearls from an amateur. Shiftless. Homeless. Penniless. Heartless; *lawless*.

Whatever had happened, it should be easy to pin the blame, if there was blame to be pinned, on a Traveller.

I wasn’t going to gratify Inspector Milne even by acknowledging that I understood what he was driving at.

“Do you remember anything about your first meeting with Euan McEwen?” Milne pressed.

“No,” I said, making a supreme effort to be polite rather than coldly hostile. “He probably saved my life. But I don’t remember him doing it.”

I began to have the uncomfortable feeling that it might be up to me to make sure Euan McEwen didn’t get blamed for whatever had actually happened that morning. And until we knew what that was, neither one of us was free of suspicion.

To my frustration, Mother was still irritatingly cautious about letting me walk by myself on the river path. But once I was on my feet again I was allowed to go visit Mary if she came to fetch me. The prolonged loss of independence would have driven me quite mad otherwise.

It was a dull, chilly day when I arrived back at the Inverfearnie Library for the first time after my injury. I was decently dressed in Mother’s skirt still, but had bundled myself up in a nursery-bathroom sweater that smelled exactly like a sheep. It was wonderful to be out of the house. As Mary and I crossed the swaying iron footbridge I was surprised to see Sergeant Angus Henderson striding down the slope of the unnatural mound of Inverfearnie Island toward us in his intimidating waterproof cape and high boots, stumping along with his ram’s-horn hook-topped cromach.

As he came toward us Mary waved.

The river watcher stopped short. His iron-gray eyebrows drew together ferociously. His face was very white.

“Miss Kinnaird—” He spoke as though he wasn’t sure. “Lady Julia?”

I couldn’t remember him ever having *noticed* me before, let alone called me by name. Being Mary’s companion must have made me special.

“Hope you’re well,” he said gruffly, doffing his tweed hat at me with military sharpness.

As we came off the bridge he gave Mary a very cordial bow and a kindly pat on the shoulder.

“No harm done here the day,” Sergeant Henderson bellowed at her.

“Oh, heavens, I should hope not!” she said.

“Aye, well, it’s quiet now those mucky tinks are away.”

“They’ll be back for the flax at Bridge Farm no doubt, if not before,” Mary said. “I’ll be glad when the Glenfearn School opens and they’re gone for good.”

“I’m counting the days,” the Water Bailiff growled. “If that young lad gives you any trouble this summer, be sure to put a call through to the Brig O’Fearn police. I’ll have his teeth on a string.”

“Thank you, Sergeant Henderson, you’re a dear. You always take good care of me.”

They shook hands and off he went to pull teeth somewhere else along his patrol.

Well! That was a surprise. Apparently the Water Bailiff had a soft spot in his heart for Mary, who acted as a sort of loyal unofficial river watcher on the front lines.

“Which ‘young lad’ did he mean?” I asked Mary as she unlocked the heavy oak front door to let us in, guessing perfectly well whom he’d meant. “Not Euan McEwen, surely, the one who took me to the hospital? I can’t *imagine* him giving you any trouble.”

She didn’t hear me. I’d have asked again, but when she turned toward me she’d already moved on.

“Now, darling, I’m often busy with library patrons and the running of the place, and I won’t be able to visit with you myself all the time you’re here. But you can help me with the Murray Collection. I’ll show you what we have to do—”

Mary led me up the winding staircase.

“My little library’s been commandeered,” she said as we emerged in the Upper Reading Room.

It was exactly as I’d left it the day I arrived at Strathfearn, with the great chestnut library table covered with artifacts. There were the spear tips spread all over the place; there was the beautiful black wooden cup in its silver filigree setting.

“Who moved the collection here?” I asked. “Did you help?”

“Dr. Housman packed the boxes. I believe the chief contractor came

along to keep an eye on the workers who brought them here.”

“Did they bring all of it? Is this the whole thing, the whole of the Murray archeological collection?” I was still thinking about the pearls that no one remembered.

“It’s all here, but it’s not all unpacked. I must make sure no one moves anything that’s on the main reading table, because that’s what Dr. Housman left there. The police were looking about, and I had such a hard time stopping them touching things.”

“Shouldn’t they have put a barrier round it or something?” I asked, impressed.

Mary gave a little laugh. “You have been reading too many Harriet Vane novels!”

“That’s true.”

“Imagine there’s an invisible barrier. These folding tables are for Sandy to use when he comes.” She brightened as she spoke my brother’s name: Mary visibly *brightened*. “He’s working on a project in London that he can’t get out of till the middle of July, and I suppose Housman might come back before then, but I thought I’d try to get things ready for Sandy just in case.”

She paused, still a little bit flushed, and it dawned on me that she called me “Julia” and she called the missing antiquarian “Dr. Housman,” and the “dear” Water Bailiff got called by his military rank. But when Mary spoke of my big brother, Granddad’s heir, who has always been “the Honorable Alexander Lawson Murray Wallace Beaufort-Stuart” and is now by Special Remainder “Alexander Beaufort-Stuart, Earl of Strathfearn,” she simply called him “Sandy.” And he wasn’t even here yet.

“Mary, you have given yourself away,” I said, and she knew exactly what I was talking about, because her smooth and shapeless cheeks went even pinker. “You and Sandy?”

“No, no! We’re friends. I read his article and wrote to him about it, and he wrote back. We write each other all the time now, by return post sometimes. He visited in the spring to see your grandfather just before he died, and—and Sandy and I went walking.”

“Just walking?” I said, disbelieving. I wasn’t trying to be coy. I really wanted to know.

“Well, no! *Not* just walking. But not what you think. He sat here after your grandfather’s funeral and drank such a quantity of whisky that I thought he’d drown himself—in the River Fearn, properly, not metaphorically in drink—if he tried to make his way back to the Big House alone in the dark. I let him stay here, which was perhaps not the correct thing to do, but he’d fallen asleep at last in the chair in my study, and I didn’t have the heart to wake him....”

“Nor would I!”

“Exactly.”

Mary knew she was blushing, and turned her face away from mine in embarrassment. "I know he would never—well, Julia, you see me for what I am. But I like him more than anyone I know, and I don't have many friends. Sergeant Henderson is a *dear*, you know, but he's not really a *friend*. I am concerned for Dr. Housman, but I am selfishly glad his disappearance means I am to work with Sandy—" Mary hesitated all of a sudden. "I wouldn't confess this to anyone but you, Julia."

"I *do* understand, Mary! And I don't spill secrets."

I obviously didn't know her *any bit* as well as I thought I did.

Because...

Mary and Sandy! I couldn't imagine it. I couldn't imagine Mary with *anyone*. But was that because I thought she was not—not, say, *ordinary* enough to have ordinary desires and ambitions? Perhaps my feeling that she had a "kind" face was as unthinking and shallow as Euan and Ellen calling her a goblin.

What Sandy thought was another story. A story I didn't know.

Mary became brisk again all of a sudden. "Now, darling, I don't want you sitting about here idly, so you can help me set up the card tables and unpack the boxes. The tables are going to go around the edges of the room in front of the shelves. It'll make it very tight, so be sure to leave a gap for people to walk. And if you could make a note of *everything* you take out of the boxes and which table you put it on, that would be most useful."

I couldn't believe my luck, really. Perhaps I'd come across Granddad's pearls myself. Taking an inventory of the Murray Hoard would be a fabulous way to spend my convalescence. And maybe I'd find some clue as to what had happened to Housman.

After nearly a fortnight of being treated with the fearful gentleness one might use to handle a treasured pet parakeet with a broken wing, it was a shock to be awakened one morning with the mattress beneath my feet bouncing so hard it made the iron bed frame squeak. I raised my head and shoulders, leaning back on my elbows. And there was my favorite brother, Jamie. He is only a year older than me.

"You are going to give me another concussion," I told him.

He stopped bouncing, took one look at me, and clapped a hand over his mouth in an attempt to suffocate himself so he could not laugh. His shoulders shook.

"*Stow it!*" I said.

"Sluggard!" he accused. Then added, rather chokingly, "I think I shall call you *Feathers*."

"Don't be unkind!" I was very pleased to see him. "They cut my hair while I was insensible in hospital, and I've only just been allowed to wash it."

"It's very modern. Very gamine. You look like a jazz singer."

"Shut up."

"Actually more like that doll you used to carry around by its hair, Donald, do you remember? Till most of it fell out except that wiry ashy tuft on the very top that you used for a handle—"

I threw my pillow. He nearly threw it back, instinctive, but checked himself just in time. Instead he tucked it behind his head against the glass French window. I pulled my knees up so there was more room for him.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Much, much better."

"I thought you might need cheering up. Invalids need cheering, don't they? I'd only just got home from school myself, and I overheard Father speaking to Mother on the 'phone. You know how he echoes everything you say to show he's being attentive? 'She spent a night with the Travellers! A man standing in the river! That's all she remembers! The scholar's still AWOL!' I couldn't hear what Mother was telling him—just all the intrigue he was repeating. So here I am. I took the milk train from Aberdeen."

"You have cheered me up enormously already," I said. "Now that you're here to look after me I'll be able to go somewhere other than the library day after day! I want to retrace my steps. I want to know what happened to me."

"Let's get started," Jamie answered, grinning.

He provided me with clothes. This is the sort of thing that makes him my favorite. No other brother would have thought of it. He was patient with me eating the tea and toast he'd carried up from the kitchen, and then with me getting dressed in Mother and Solange's little room (in Mother's clothes again because although Jamie had brought me several of my favorite garments, it cannot be said he'd included anything *practical*). He got bored waiting for me to finish fussing with my hair at Mémère's dressing table.

"Let me," he said, leaning over my shoulder to commandeer the comb. "We did *HMS Pinafore* this spring and they made me be Josephine because I am so scrawny. I've become rather good at primping."

He was standing behind me, and we could see each other in the mirror. With my hair short we looked very much alike, except that he was grinning and I was scowling. "I should think you made a lovely Josephine," I said. "You are quite as pretty as me. I'll bet you wore a wig, though. Yellow curls."

"True, but not for rehearsals."

"I wish you'd brought it down with you. I could have used it."

Jamie laughed. He was deft and sure with the comb and hair grips. "It would not have suited you at all. Anyway we had a ritual burning of it after the last performance, carrying it down to the river on a pike like a

beheaded aristocrat.”

“You seem to have a great deal more fun at school than I do,” I grumbled.

Jamie stood back, lifting his hands. “There.”

He’d really done as good a job as Solange. He held a hand mirror to the back of my head so I could see how he’d hidden the stubble.

I said, “You should leave off bothering with Eton and become a ladies’—”

“Stop being such a miserable cat, Julie,” Jamie said hastily, going a little pink. “Now. Where do you want to go?”

“I’m burning to go to Inchfort Field!” I answered. “I want to see how far I got between hitting my head and falling over. I want to see if we can find any trace of Dr. Housman. And maybe the lad who rescued me has come back. The Traveller folk who took me to the hospital told me to come see them. Everyone is so *suspicious* of them, and as far as I can tell they haven’t done a thing to deserve it. I want to tell them thank you.”

FREEDOM!

We left the house through the terrace doors of the morning room and stood for a moment surveying the building works. “They’re putting down paths,” I observed, and was struck with melancholy over my grandfather not being around to appreciate this improvement. “We could have pushed Granddad about in his chair if there’d been paths last summer.”

“I remember him wishing for a smooth path down to the river. He didn’t have the money for it,” Jamie said soberly. “Cheer up. Let’s see what they’re up to over by the tennis lawn—it looks like they’re digging a swimming pool. Tell me what it was like to sleep in a Travellers’ camp!”

“I can’t remember,” I said crossly. “I was asleep the whole time.”

“Perhaps they’d let me stay with them tonight, if they’re there,” Jamie said. “Better than sleeping all by myself in one of those servants’ rooms in the attic. Or I could build a camp tent on the terrace. I wonder how deep they’ve gone with that swimming hole.”

He was doing his best to distract me—although I knew, based on his fascination for hydromechanics (or as our eldest brother, Davie, calls it, “Jamie’s obsession with drains”), that he was serious about wanting to look at the pool project.

We didn’t get too close, but it *was* interesting. There was a hole in the lawn as big as a cottage, and the invasion into the riverbank was a miniature geological history lesson if you knew how to read it, slices of different-colored earth piled neatly one on top of the other like a giant layer cake with green grass icing on top. The layer they were currently digging into looked like Black Forest gâteau.

“Peat,” Jamie commented. “I wonder if they’ll find anything

interesting in it. Remember the log boat, under the water near the river gate by Aberfearn Castle? That's three thousand years old. They can tell because the peat's laid down into it, all around it."

"Show-off. You only know that because you've read it in Sandy's antiquarian article."

"We could go see if they've uncovered it. It's still there. They must be digging nearby if they're laying pipes beneath the riverbed for this pool."

"*Drains!*" I exclaimed in disgust. "What about the Traveller folk camping at Inchfort?"

"I'll go look at the pipes on my own later," Jamie conceded generously.

We carried on down to the river path, just as I'd done two weeks earlier, and turned upstream along the Fearn. I watched my brother's face change as he gazed around him at the birchwood. I knew he was feeling exactly as I'd felt that first day here, all the sadness and joy.

Jamie spoke quietly.

"I can't believe this isn't Murray land anymore. And to think I wouldn't even be here if it hadn't been for your sore head! I felt like Granddad's funeral was the end. I'm glad I came."

We walked for a little while without talking. But when we got to Inverfearnie Island, we both jumped along the iron footbridge to make it bounce, and ended up laughing. We passed the open door of the old library, crossed the mossy stone bridge to the other side of the burn, and took the path toward Brig O'Fearn by way of Inchfort Field. The river wood hadn't changed in the least bit since the first day I'd arrived.

We'd nearly reached the bend in the river where the beachy place and the big stones are when the yellow dog came bounding out of the undergrowth along the path as if it had been waiting for us.

It really did come straight toward us as if we were old friends. It saw us, scampered around us both in a circle of excitement, then made a rash decision and plunged into the clear brown waters of the Fearn.

Something tugged at my brain.

The dog found its footing and scrambled out again, bounding through the tangle of nettles and forget-me-nots on the riverbank. It shook itself gloriously and was suddenly transformed from a dripping rag to a golden powder puff, like a pantomime Cinderella under her fairy godmother's wand. She was a very beautiful tan Border collie. She chose me to leap upon in greeting.

And I knew her.

This dog—this sodden whirlwind of golden fluff—was one of those terribly sweet, terribly brainless characters that you can't take anywhere if you want to work: she barks at sheep, she'll scare the grouse before your gun is loaded, she leaps at strange girls to give them kisses. That's what she was doing now, and I knew that's what she'd done the day I met her, the day I'd fallen.

"Pinkie! You silly, silly girl! Down, love, good girl, Pinkie—"

You see, I even knew her name.

Jamie helped to drag her off me before she knocked me down. She shook herself again, splattering us with river water.

"I *do* remember you—" I fondled her ears. "Pinkie, love, where are your people?"

She pranced away from me toward the river's bend. She knew where her people were, and she was going to take me to meet them.

They were standing in the burn by the flat rock, fishing for pearls with glass-bottomed jugs and pronged sticks, just like the man I'd seen before my head exploded. Unlike him, they knew what they were doing.

One of them looked up at us and waved. It was Euan McEwen. He was so clearly a younger copy of his tall and ginger-haired companion that it took me one glance to guess the older man was Euan and Ellen's father.

"That's the Traveller lad who found me," I told Jamie. "And his dad, I think."

They were both wearing waders, but the water scarcely came to their knees. When Euan saw us he pulled the tin-and-glass jug of his trade out of the water and slung it over his shoulder.

"You're looking bonny, Davie Balfour!" he shouted.

The dog ran to meet him. She took a flying leap off the flat rock and into the water. The older man winced away from the splash with a strangled noise that was half groan, half laughter. She was obviously not a working dog.

"You're here! Hurrah!" I cried in answer to Euan. "I remember your dog—the daftie! She jumped all over me!"

"This is my dad, Alan McEwen," Euan said. "Dad, here's our Davie Balfour come back from the dead."

Funny things, names. Funny how it felt easy and natural for me to call Euan by his first name, and daring and grown-up to call Frank by his. I suppose I would never call Mother by her given name either, though she is Mummy in fondness.

I liked it that Euan kept calling me Davie. It felt special and friendly, though I think he did it partly to avoid having to call me Lady Julia.

"This is my brother Jamie," I said. I was trying to make it clear I didn't want the dreadful formality of a title—especially since it was only me, as the Earl of Craigie's daughter, who had this dilemma; Jamie, a younger son, isn't saddled with a courtesy title in everyday speech. I added firmly: "And I'm Julie."

Alan McEwen whipped off his cap and flashed us a McEwen grin. "You're looking braw, lass! Hello, Jamie."

Jamie knelt on the flat rock and held out a hand. Alan McEwen gave it a wet shake. Pinkie sloshed about around the McEwen men's legs, struggling a little against the current.

"I wanted to thank you for taking me to Perth the other week," I told him. "And Mrs. McEwen, too."

Alan McEwen smiled warmly. "Mrs. McEwen will be glad to know you're on your feet again."

"Have you found anything?" Jamie asked.

Alan McEwen grimaced a little.

"We've five fat fiddle-bellied crooks for Mrs. McEwen to open. But I dinnae like to see so much rubbish chucked in the burn—glass target balls and tins and jam jars and whatnot. Washing downstream frae the village, I suppose, but it saddens me, folk using the burn as a midden. Not like the old days."

"You can get a penny for a jam jar," Euan said.

"I'm no' divin' for rubbish."

"I say, can I see?" Jamie asked, as eager as the dog. "Could I take a look through your glass jug?"

Mr. McEwen smiled. "Aye, but you'll have to get wet—"

"Go on," I told Jamie enthusiastically, anticipating an excellent variety performance. "The water's pretty low. The chap I saw fishing here two weeks ago was up to his waist!"

"The Fearn's tidal all the way beyond Brig O'Fearn village," explained Alan McEwen. "It's coming up on a spring tide just now. Makes the high tides extra high and the low tides extra low."

Jamie undid a couple of buttons at his throat and shrugged out of his shirt. He handed it to me for safekeeping, and just like Pinkie, slid off the flat rock and sloshed into the burn. Euan passed his pearl-fishing glass across to Jamie so he could look below the surface of the water.

Jamie's arms and shoulders were fair as flax, as though he'd spent the last ten years in a dungeon. He bent over by the flat rock, and as he leaned down, light from the river caught his face and light from the sky gleamed on his bare back, and—incredible. Incredible the way it comes back. Just like that. It happened in a flash, in an instant of clarity—sparked by another pale body standing in the River Fearn—

The man in the river on the day I'd fallen—there was a reason I'd thought he was comical. There was a reason I hadn't been able to remember his clothes.

He hadn't been wearing any.

That man had been stark naked. Seeing Jamie with his back stripped bare, with the reflected light off the water on his face, made me remember.

I could see the other man perfectly now, splashing about when he lost his cap, the lenses of his glasses spangled with drops of water after he submerged his face. Those shifting dots of light on his skin like gold coins—I'd seen those because he'd been wearing glasses. The lenses had reflected in the river as he moved. I hadn't been able to see his eyes, focused on something below the surface of the water.

I stood quite still, remembering. It was a bit like being hit on the head all over again. It made me go quiet for a moment.

But then Pinkie came crashing out of the stream, romping up devotedly to keep me company, since everyone else was in the water. I took a deep breath. Jamie peered intently at his feet, or something, through the glass jug. I wondered what he could see. The McEwens stood by watching, indulging him.

“What happened after Euan brought me up to your camp?” I asked. “Did you try to find where I’d come from? I was *here* when I hit my head. There was a man—I saw someone in the burn here, over by the Drookit Stane in the middle of the stream. We think it was the scholar who was working at the library, and no one’s seen him since that day, either—”

“Aye, the police have been sniffing around here looking for him,” said Alan McEwen. “We knew him because he’d been in about the place last month, wanting to know the good fishing spots for Fearn pearls. Nice enough gadgie and a friend of Strathfearn’s, but none of our business.”

“How did I get up the path to Inchfort Field before you found me, Euan—did Dr. Housman carry me?”

“He might have,” Euan answered. “It was Pinkie found you. Your scholar might have been frightened by the dog, and put you down, and gone away again.”

Alan McEwen laughed. “Frighted by *that*!”

“Well, Dad, some people don’t like dogs. And Pinkie was with her when I found her.”

“Did you see the other man?” I asked.

Jamie straightened up to listen, intrigued. Euan shook his head.

“We found that cap, lad,” Mr. McEwen said. “The Water Bailiff took it away with him for the police to look at, remember?”

“So we did.”

“What did he look like, your man in the stream?” Jamie asked suddenly. “Was he wearing gold wire-rimmed specs?”

My mouth dropped open. Because he had been.

“*Why?*”

Jamie bent over, using the jug to pinpoint something at his feet, and reached into the water with his free hand. He came up dripping, holding something that glinted gold between his fingers.

It was a thin metallic wand, slender as a stem of wheat and about as long as Jamie’s hand. It curled at the end like a giant fishhook. It was a shape that made no sense, a thing that had no business being in the river, and yet there was also something perfectly ordinary and familiar about it.

“It’s a temple,” Jamie said.

“It’s a what?” said Euan.

“It’s one side of a pair of spectacles. A temple. You know, the arm thing that holds your glasses on your head—it hooks over your ear.”

“There’s all sorts of rubbish in the burn,” said Mr. McEwen. “Folk are careless.”

I didn’t consciously remember that Dr. Housman had been wearing broken glasses. But when I’d doodled that pair of spectacles, they’d been missing one side.



Jamie’s small gold twist of wire was the piece that had come off—the piece I hadn’t seen.

It had to be a trace of Dr. Housman. But it didn’t tell me a damned thing more than I already knew.

“This sun is burning me already, I can feel it,” Jamie said, hauling himself wet and gleaming as a selkie onto the flat rock. “Give me back my shirt before I am entirely grilled.” He looked up at me. “Are you all right?”

I nodded. I didn’t quite trust myself to speak.

“I expect we’ll have to hand that in to the police to go with the chap’s cap,” Jamie said.

“We’ll let you do that,” said Alan McEwen. “They’ve been round here twice already poking their nebs in about, and they dinnae like us. No point in looking for trouble.”

“Well, the Water Bailiff is a terrifying man, and no mistake,” said Jamie. “He’s thrashed me and every one of my brothers at some time or other—our Sandy used to dive to look at the log boat sticking out of the peat near the mouth of the Fearn, and the Water Bailiff hauled him out of the river once and thrashed him with a birch switch without even letting him get dressed first. I’ll take this in to the police and leave you out of it.”

Mr. McEwen strode through the water and waded out onto the little beach, where I was standing with Pinkie. “Come along up to the camp and meet Mrs. McEwen,” he invited. “You can thank her yourself for the care she gave you; she’ll be happy to see you well again, lass. And now that we know you’re one of Strathfearn’s—well, I knew your granddad, and he’d have done the same for any of my bairns. A fine man, Strathfearn, the finest.”

“And maybe we’ll find a pearl or two inside the crooks we’ve got for Mammy,” Euan said. “Come and watch her open them.”

5. What's your proper work?

You know what I was expecting to find at the McEwens' camping place? A community of twenty families, a nomadic village of tents, each with its own cooking fire, filling Inchfort Field like a ghost of the Roman military outpost it is named for. But the McEwens had got a most modest setup, in a high, sunny corner of the field sheltered by the beech hedge of the estate boundary. They'd parked themselves as far away as possible from the queer old standing stone at the bottom of the field, covered with lichen-carvings of starey-eyed fish, and I didn't blame 'em. Granddad always told us that stone walks down the path to join the tall Drookit Stane in the river on Harvest Night and swim with the salmon in the dark. Antiquarians are all secretly pagan heretics.

There weren't twenty people, let alone twenty families camped at Inchfort Field, and a third of those were little.

"Gosh, I thought there were more of you here!" I said as we crossed the field. "Everybody makes it sound like—"

"The place is crawling with tinks?" Euan made *tinks* sound like *bedbugs*. Suddenly he reminded me very much of his twin sister. My heart leaped again, thinking Ellen might be there.

"Well I didn't say it."

"There's three families here. Daddy's and his brother's. And Mammy's best friend and her daughter and her man. Lots of weans—you'll see! And Daddy's old auntie Bessie, who's got no family but ours."

Ellen was there. She and Mrs. McEwen and the very old Auntie Bessie were the only grown-ups about, though there were a handful of wee lassies skipping rope lower down the field; everyone else was out thinning turnips at Bridge Farm. Ellen was busy, though, stripping bark from whippy willow branches. The old woman fed bits of bark to a fire over glowing coals, and Mrs. McEwen was deftly weaving a willow basket with the supple wands that Ellen gave her. They were looking after the wee-est of the bairns while they worked—Ellen had a baby tied cuddled against her chest in a shawl, its downy hair just brushing her chin. Her own hair was a glory of copper fire that morning, shining like a whisky still, long and loose in gentle flames down her back.

"Mammy, we've brought our lucky lass for you to meet," Euan called out as we came close. "She's awake and walking."

Their mother, Jean McEwen, laughed. "Looks like our Pinkie's found a new best friend!"

Their mother wasn't like the other McEwens at all. She was little and merry and good-natured. Instantly I wished I'd thought to bring her a

gift, and wanted to kick myself for not having anything to offer.

I knelt abruptly in front of her. When she put aside the willow withies she'd been weaving, I snatched up her hands, held them close together in mine, and kissed them. "Hello, Mrs. McEwen! I think I owe you my life."

She shook her head and laughed. "Och, Lady Julia, no such thing. I only kept the rain off you for a night!"

"And isn't that a woman's proper work, sheltering bairns?" Ellen remarked coolly.

Mrs. McEwen still grasped my hands—I'd instinctively done the right thing to greet her so warmly—but Ellen McEwen held my gaze with chilly challenge, menacing and stony-faced.

I wanted very much for her to like me.

"Well, somebody has to look after bairns," I said.

I swear, it was as though I could read Ellen's mind. She was practically daring me to ask her: Is that *your* baby, Ellen McEwen?

In the same instant, I was certain that it wasn't. She was just waiting for me to jump to conclusions about her, in exactly the same way the St. John's hospital staff had jumped to conclusions about me.

"What's your proper work?" I asked her.

"What's yours, wee primsie toffee-nose?"

"Whisht, Nellie!" the very old woman scolded her.

"I'm still in school," I said. "So's Jamie."

"I'm a willow-basket weaver," Ellen said in a voice that made it sound like she'd made it up on the spot.

"Oh, aye?" Jamie slung himself down on the grass by her side, artless and winning. "Did you cut all this lot yourself? Do you make your own creels?" He patted her small fisherman's basket, on the ground next to her. "There were always *piles* of baskets in the Big House, they use 'em for everything from sandwiches to guns. We used to see people cutting willows on the far bank where the Fearn meets the Tay."

Ellen looked down her nose at him, the tiniest of smiles curled in the corner of her mouth.

"Aye, Jamie Stuart, that's us. That's *our* willow bank. We *own* it, by ancient deed. Since before the new house was built. Since the Murrays lived in the castle."

The "new" house, Strathfearn House, replaced a Georgian mansion destroyed by fire. The castle is five hundred years old, and nobody has lived in it since the eighteenth century. "Since the Murrays lived in the castle" is a very long time ago, however you look at it.

"And that's us banned after your gran moves out," Ellen added grimly, and the rudimentary smile disappeared.

"But why, if it's yours?" Jamie asked.

"There's no place to camp after this year. You can't camp on the riverbank because of the mud and the tide. So that's us done with those willows. *Forever*. The camping green by Bridge Farm's been closed down

by the County Council, and Inchoft Field will be closed off when the Glenfearn School opens. *Shaness!* We've always done casual work for the Strathfearn estate—working the fields, gardening, helping with the grouse shooting. But those scaldy builders aren't interested in giving us work, and I ken the Glenfearn School won't want *filthy tinkers* anywhere near their boys. And the pearl fishing—we won't be able to do that here, either. Do you know what Fearn pearls are worth? *Ten pound* Daddy got for one last year."

Cripes. At that rate, twenty-five pearls would pay Jamie's school fees at Eton for a year. And there was me ten years ago as a little girl, playing with Granddad's pearls like marbles, and me now feeling sentimental that my pretty toys were gone.

It makes you very uncomfortable to realize that your emotional attachment to something is an indulgence.

"Neither did our gran want to have to sell the estate," I said hotly.

Ellen gave a snort. "Your poor gran. Hungry, is she?"

Ellen's mother apologized firmly. "Never mind our Ellen. She's angered about the big changes, and she's still mourning your granddad. His passing's a great sorrow to all of us. Your mother Esmé and I were playmates when we were half your age."

The old woman added, "See, Nell, she's got her granddad's eyes—hazel as autumn leaves turning, clear as Cairngorm mountain amber."

I couldn't help smiling at her. "Thank you! I loved Granddad's eyes."

Ellen gave an undisguised snort of disgust. I could hear her thinking at me: FATHEAD. I was not making a good impression.

"I've five fine mussels for you to open, Jean," Mr. McEwen said briskly to his wife. "We'll let the lucky lass try one as well, aye? Give her a sup of tea, and I'll crack these crooks the while."

"Bessie, put the tea can on," said Ellen's mother.

"Julie, take it off again," I misquoted on purpose, and they all laughed, except crabbit Ellen, and I felt warm. *This* was more like it, this was what was missing in the stifling, strained atmosphere back at Strathfearn House—ordinary cups of tea with people laughing and chatting over them. I hadn't realized how tense and worried my people were until I was away from them, or how much it was weighing on me.

While the big black tea can boiled and Mr. McEwen prized open the mussel shells, I had time to make good sense of the small campsite. There was a cooking fire in an old sheep-dip tin, standing on flat stones on the bare earth where they'd cut away the turf so it could be filled in when they left. A handful of chickens scavenged together under the hedges, and there were a couple of placid ponies and a couple of fine-looking horses cropping grass in the sun, and a wagon and a smaller cart by the gate. There was a long bow tent snugly made of hazel wands and sacking; there was also an old military tent. Clean washing hung discreetly on poles behind the tents. All the shelters looked sturdy but

could be easily dismantled when they decided to move on; nothing wasted.

“Where do you draw water?” Jamie asked.

“From the burn for washing,” said Mrs. McEwen. “From Boatman’s Well for drinking.”

“But it’s so brownish-yellowish!” I protested.

“Och, that’s just peat,” Mrs. McEwen answered. “Peat never hurt anyone.”

“Gives flavor to the tea,” said Ellen slyly as Bessie set out tin cups, one of which would be mine in a moment or two.

I answered boldly, “I cannot wait to try some.” I had not ever drunk from the Boatman’s Well before, but I am not afraid of PEAT, Miss Ellen McEwen.

“Here you are, Davie.” Euan knelt beside me and handed me the first mussel.

Scottish river mussels are not like the little ones you get in the sea, or find scoured as blue and white shells along the tide line. The five mussels that Alan McEwen had brought back for his wife were as long as my hand, and nearly as wide, narrowed in the middle like fiddles.

“That’s maybe a good hundred years old,” said Mr. McEwen, indicating the one I held. “Older than the Big House. Go on, open her up.”

It was smooth and brown as a leather billfold, and it opened like a hymnal. I couldn’t see anything that looked like a pearl, though the inside of the shell was beautiful. I held the two halves spread wide on my palms while Mrs. McEwen slid her thumbs underneath the shell’s luckless inhabitant—but there was nothing in it but a gray blob of dying mussel.

I felt sad, all of a sudden—not about there being no pearl, but about us having killed a wild thing that had been minding its own business in the River Fearn for a hundred years or more. A little violation.

“Ah well, there’s four more here!” McEwen Sr. said cheerfully.

“What do you do with them after?” I asked. “Can you eat them?”

“Eh, no, lass,” Mrs. McEwen said. “Too big and tough. You’re thinking of sea mussels. Pinkie can have the insides.” She took the next and used the edge of the first shell to prize the new one open.

“Ah!”

We all crowded closer to see what she’d found.

She laid the shell on her lap. There was a small deformity in the blob of mussel there, a little membrane bag, and she pinched it between her fingers and squeezed out the pearl.

“Well, this is a bonny wee thing, but will MacGregor’s buy it without a match?”

She dropped it into the palm of her other hand so we could see it. It was shaped like a teardrop, and the palest salmon color, like a cool sunset. It was beautiful and strange.

“Run your thumbs beneath the meat. There may be more.” She held the shell up to me.

I copied what she’d done earlier. An inch of smooth slime, then sudden rolling grains like barley beneath my thumbs. It surprised me. “Oh!”

They all laughed at me.

“It’s full of them!” I gasped.

Mrs. McEwen took the shell from me. She slipped half a dozen peachy pearls into the palm of her hand to show me. “Luck’s with us now!” she said, and gave me the next mussel.

There was nothing in that one, either, nor the fourth. They handed me the fifth.

“Ellen, you’ve not had a shot,” I said.

She shrugged. “You’re the lucky one.”

“Well *no*, I haven’t actually found anything. That was your mum’s shell that had all the pink pearls in it. You have this one. Then it’s on me if it’s a dud, and it’s on you if it isn’t.”

Ellen stared at me over the silky hair of the sleeping baby tied against her chest. Then, unexpectedly, she laughed. “I like those odds. Give it me.” She paused, then said with exaggerated politeness, “Pass the crook here, *Lady Julia*.”

What’s my proper work, Ellen McEwen? I am going to make you call me Julie.

I gave her the crook. She opened it.

Inside, in its membrane sac, there was a perfect creamy pale pink pearl nearly the size of a marble. It must have been worth a packet.

“Lady Julia, ye’re a fairy,” said old Bessie.

Jamie laughed. “Don’t give her ideas.”

But my mind was working, it’s true. I was thinking about the villainous man Granddad had caught, who’d torn through all the young mussels on the riverbed in nearly exactly the same place where the McEwens had been fishing, and how he’d found nothing; how if he’d known where to look, all along, these hundred-year-old shells full of pearls were just sitting there for the taking. They’d been there all the time.

And I wondered how many Dr. Housman had found. He’d had those beautiful earrings made for Solange. Maybe he’d found an ancient river pearl that was absolutely extraordinary, or more than one, and he’d gone off to get them valued, or to sell them and bank the proceeds; maybe he was trying to do it quietly because Granddad was dead and the house was sold, and he wasn’t really sure whether those pearls belonged to him or to the Glenfearn School or to the King himself.

Ellen gave her pearl to her mother.

I offered to help with the washing up, still trying to win her over—with willing friendliness if nothing else, much like Pinkie.

"Off you go back to your granny's," said Mrs. McEwen. "She needs your help with the packing more than we do."

"Actually, I've been *unpacking*," I laughed. "Since Dr. Housman's not around, I've been helping Mary Kinnaird sort out the Murray Collection at the Inverfearnie Library. Our brother Sandy's going to do the cataloging when he gets here. I keep hoping I'll find treasure that everyone else has forgotten about."

"And to think folk call us sleekit, you spoilt wee galoot of a schoolgirl!" exclaimed Ellen. "But say: Can you take me to see the Murray Collection?"

"Well, of course!" I'd have thrown myself under a *bus* to get her to thaw a little. But I should have guessed the Murray Hoard might interest her. Euan had said she'd gone to the library to borrow the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries* annual in which Sandy had published that article about the log boat.

"Our Nell worked on the drawings for Strathfearn's collection, two years ago, when it got so hard for him to see," Jean McEwen explained.

"I measured and drew all his spear tips," said Ellen, not without pride. "Could we go look at it *now*? I want to see the Reliquary again."

"Now—why not?" I said. "The library's open...."

All unexpectedly, with quick and efficient hands, Ellen untied the shawl that held the sleeping baby. The small person opened her eyes and yawned and blinked and crinkled up her face, and I could see the little fists opening and closing. Jean McEwen reached out welcoming arms and Ellen gave her the baby.

Jamie bounded to his feet to offer Ellen a gallant hand to help her get up. He really was layering it on. I suppose I was, too. "What's the Reliquary?" Jamie asked.

"A reliquary's a wee pot you keep a saint's finger bone in, or something," said Ellen. "Your granddad's one looks like a cup."

"Black wood?" I asked. "Set in silver, spiraling around it like the fish on the Salmon Stane? That is my favorite thing in the collection."

"Aye, and it's special to Strathfearn," Ellen told us. "We gave it to the Murrays to pay for the willow bank." She made it sound as though the transaction had happened yesterday, not four hundred years ago or whatever it had been. "Your Granddad was worried it would be sold when he died, and one of the things I did for him was to write to the National Museum of Antiquities about it. He wanted them to be able to bid on it first."

"Oh!" I gasped. I realized that here was someone who might actually know, who might remember. "Were there pearls in it?"

Ellen dropped Jamie's hand. For a moment she stood staring at me strangely.

"No."

She held my gaze, just as she'd done when I'd first seen her in the

hospital. She fixed me in the disintegrator ray of her stony blue eyes.

"There weren't any pearls in it that I've ever seen. But there were pearls in it when we gave it to the Murrays. That was part of the price for the land. It was a long time ago."

"That's the way the tale is told," said Alan McEwen gently.

And then I wondered if maybe I'd just *imagined* the pearls. I wondered if Granddad had told me the same tale, and in my head I'd been so taken with the wonderful image of the immeasurably ancient black-and-silver cup filled to the brim with pearls, that I'd put them there myself without ever having really seen them.

It made sense. In the past two weeks I'd learned that memory is a strange and unreliable thing.

And yet...I thought I could still remember *playing* with those pearls.

Ellen reached down to pick up her creel basket and sling it over her shoulder. "I didn't think I'd get to see the Reliquary again," she said. "You come too, Euan. You've never seen it. You should see it before it's sold."

The library was officially open, with a card posted in the window to let you know, and the great oak door was propped wide, welcoming. Pinkie, still damp from her swim, was too enthusiastic about coming in with us.

"Euan spoils her when she was a pup," Ellen said. "Bitches are useless anyway, but he had to go and carry her about in a bucket everywhere we went."

Ellen paused, waiting, as if something in what she'd said had been a test.

Jamie figured her out ahead of me. "So that's why she's called Pinkie," he laughed. "*Pinkie's* your word for *bucket*, aye?"

I felt that I'd not passed. I was a bit meanly glad that it was *me* the enthusiastic dog didn't want to leave. We finally had to shut the door on her. We could hear her mourning sadly outside, presumably lying pressed against the doorstep.

I led the way through the library. We crossed the downstairs room with the glass cases, Euan silently following the rest of us in some heightened state of reluctant stealth.

"Hallo the library!" I yelled.

Mary didn't hear me. We made our way up the spiral stairs to the Upper Reading Room. It was empty; Mary must have been in her study downstairs. Ellen looked around the room with an odd expression, for the first few seconds not taking in the collection spread across the tables, but just taking in the *library*: the smell of ink and foxy paper and old wood, the green view of the river beyond the leaded casement window propped open just an inch. As if she loved it, but was a little scared to be there.

And then her gaze swept over the Murray Hoard. Her lips parted as if

she were inhaling it like smoke.

"We're not supposed to touch anything on the central table," I felt obliged to point out. "*Jamie.*"

"I shall put it back exactly where I picked it up," he said, reaching for the Reliquary.

He held it out to Ellen.

She hesitated for a moment, then took it gingerly, using both hands to cup it on the tips of her fingers. Just the way she held it made it seem more special.

"It's smaller than the one the National Museum have already," she told us. "So your granddad said. But maybe even older."

"Beautiful Celtic craftsmanship," said Jamie. "Were they interested?"

"I don't know. Strathfearn had a secretary read his correspondence, not me. Also he'd crack away on the telephone and make folk confirm what they'd said to him in writing, but then he'd often not bother to open the letter when it came! The Reliquary's still here, anyway. Euan—you have a shot. You've never held it."

She passed the cup reverently to her brother.

And then Mary popped up the stairs behind us.

She and Euan found themselves gazing into each other's faces over my shoulder.

"God pity us all," I heard Euan mutter.

"Oh!" Mary cried. She stamped her foot. "*Put that down this instant!* How dare you come in here!"

I had not ever seen her angry before.

There wasn't any space between the crowded folding tables and the big permanent chestnut one for Euan to back away. He gave the cup to Jamie, who put it back down hastily, in exactly the spot where it had been when we came in. Nothing else was disturbed in the least.

"We brought the McEwens." I tried to make an excuse for them.

"Please don't be angry with Euan. He came with me and Jamie."

I didn't say any of it loudly enough and Mary wasn't looking at me to see my mouth move. I bawled at her good ear, "He's with us! Euan and Ellen came with us!"

Mary hesitated, watching my face and waiting for me to elaborate.

"It was Jamie—it was me, poking around here, showing off. Please don't—"

Mary faced me with blazing eyes and railed as if Ellen and Euan weren't within hearing distance, or as if they were incapable of taking instruction themselves.

"How *dare* you allow *those people* to lay even a finger on the Murray Collection! If you brought them here, you tell them to get out, this minute, and wait for you outside! I won't have them in here! After all you've been through, to *think* of going about with *their kind!*" She paused for breath. "You tell them to get out."

Of course I didn't need to tell Euan. By the time Mary had finished, Euan had already scuttled back down the stairs. I heard the clunk and crash of the heavy front door being opened hastily. For a long moment Ellen held my gaze with a look of bleak frost in her smoky eyes. Then she drew herself up to her full height—not as tall as her brother, but nevertheless queenly among us slight Murrays—and said to Mary clearly, “It’s a public library. It’s Council property. Nobody need get your permission to come in when it’s open.”

Mary turned around and galloped downstairs. Jamie and Ellen and I stood alone in the Upper Reading Room feeling rather stunned at how quickly the librarian had come and gone.

“I’m sorry,” Jamie said quietly, after a moment. “That was my fault.”

“It’s you with the damp trousers,” Ellen said bitterly. “And us the librarian chucks out.”

But she didn’t go. She walked defiantly around the long chestnut table, her hands carefully locked behind her back so she couldn’t possibly touch anything. She was just *looking*.

At last she stopped by the spear points. “See those drawings?” she said, with a nod of her head at a sheaf of paper in the middle of the green baize table cover. “Those are mine.”

She amended bitterly, “I mean, they’re not *mine*. But I made them.”

She finished her tour of the room.

“Well, I expect Euan’s waiting.”

She would have gone down just then, I think; but now Mary, having left us alone with the Murray Collection for what seemed an unnaturally long time, came back up, pink and panting with exertion. It was silly to pretend I didn’t know what she objected to in the McEwens. But I’d never imagined Mary to be capable of such—well, of such *meanness*.

Of course she must really be just as capable of meanness as anybody else. As capable of it as I am, for example.

“I’ve spoken to you before,” she said coldly to Ellen.

“I’m *away*,” said Ellen fiercely, and bolted down the stairs.

Mary turned on me. “How *could* you bring them in here, Julia!” she exclaimed. “And they were *picking up the artifacts*—I can tell that boy had just come from the river—his sleeves were still wet! My goodness. I do understand they can be good people, they did look after you when they found you in difficulty, but to bring that lad in here and let him touch things! And the way those folk mutter under their breath, blessing themselves and whatnot when they see me, as if I were a magpie sent to foretell a death. It’s not civilized. Those people are careless as can be, and I’ve to be so particular with this room now—”

“Excuse me,” Jamie said, squeezing past her toward the stairs. “I’m sorry, Miss Kinnaird—I’ve just come from the river also.”

Mary and I were left staring at each other.

I moved my mouth silently, saying words I couldn’t quite bear to

speak aloud because I didn't quite mean them.

I'm sorry, too.

Then I ran down the stairs after the others.

They were gathered at the iron footbridge. Jamie and Euan, with his cap pulled low over his eyes, were perched on dangerously sagging rails opposite each other with Pinkie lying subdued at their feet—someone must have given her a severe talking-to. The heron was fishing under the bridge beneath them.

Euan slid off his perch as I came out. I saw the bridge shudder, dipping closer to the rushing water, as he came down hard on his feet. The heron took off, heading downstream with long, slow wingbeats. Euan tipped up the peak of his cap so he could see me, but didn't take it off.

"She likes me," he said briefly and with a perfectly straight face; when I got close enough he could say it without raising his voice.

"Look, *we* like you," said Jamie. "I just didn't realize. I wouldn't have —" He shut up abruptly. It was an embarrassing, *excruciating* apology for all of us, mostly because it didn't do any good and never would. I caught hold of one of the cables fastening the bridge to the ground, gripping hard with both hands. Euan and Jamie jumped to attention at my elbows, concerned, as if they thought I was about to catapult myself over the cable and into the burn.

"I'm *fine*. I'm *just so angry*."

Ellen watched me with something like disdain. "Not used to it, are you?"

She opened her fisherman's creel and drew out a little white clay pipe, which she filled from a leather tobacco pouch worn dark and soft before clamping the pipe between her teeth like a sailor.

"Block the wind for me and I'll give you a draw," she said to Euan. She dug out a box of matches, and she and Euan worked together with cupped hands around the little flame. When they'd got the pipe alight Ellen had the first shot at smoking it; then, puffing out smoke like a steam engine, she handed it over to Euan.

They passed it back and forth, sharing, but not with me and Jamie. The silence was heavy and awkward. Jamie threw me a querying look: *Should we go?*

As we hesitated, they finished the pipe. Ellen leaned down to knock out the tobacco residue against the foot of the bridge. She was just packing the pipe back into her creel when Sergeant Angus Henderson came barreling along the drive at a terrific pace on his bicycle, his long cromach under his arm like a jousting lance.

He came to a tearing halt before us, the bicycle tires spewing up gravel almost as if he were reining in a galloping horse. He threw the

bicycle aside.

“Well now, young McEwen,” the river watcher growled.

Euan took a step backward and Pinkie cowered, the craven thing. Ellen stood with her fists clenched, the tendons standing out along her wrists, her face drained of blood.

For a wild moment I imagined Sergeant Henderson was challenging Euan to a duel, perhaps with quarterstaves like Little John and Robin Hood. He clapped his tweed hat squarely against the back of his head and thumped the cromach against the ground between him and Euan with a crack that would have broken Euan’s foot if he’d meant it to. Ellen jumped back and crashed into Jamie, who steadied her with a quick light touch of one hand on her shoulder.

“Ye dare, lad!” the river watcher said, in that quiet, laden, tense tone—as if he were reining in passion. “Ye dare fright that good woman Mary Kinnaird—ye dare set foot in the house she lives in and watches over, ye dare touch any of the treasures she keeps there! She was fair weeping when she rang!”

That was why it had taken Mary so long to come back to the Upper Reading Room after she’d chased Euan downstairs. She’d telephoned Angus Henderson to come and clear away the riffraff.

Euan’s face, like Ellen’s, was drained of color. He was on the balls of his feet in his worn tackety boots, poised for flight. But there were too many of us crowded at the foot of the narrow, swaying bridge for him to run that way, so he was cornered.

Henderson’s staff rose and fell.

Ellen reached out—instinctively, I think—to grab hold of the person nearest in front of her, and it was me. Jamie tried to shove past us, but Ellen was digging her fingers into my forearm so fiercely they left little round black bruises there later. At the time I didn’t feel it. I’d grabbed hold of her, too. It all happened so suddenly.

The cromach crashed across Euan’s shins. He stumbled, and Henderson hooked him by the ankle with his staff and hauled him back against his broad chest, so that he and Euan were nearly cheek to cheek over Euan’s shoulder. The river watcher held Euan fast.

“Next time Mary Kinnaird tells me you’ve set foot on Inverfearnie Island I’ll throw you into prison for attempted theft.”

Euan nodded understanding, his eyes clenched shut.

Jamie managed to put me and Ellen behind him and boldly took hold of Sergeant Henderson’s cromach. But he underestimated the force he’d need to wrestle it from Henderson’s grasp. With one arm hooked around Euan’s neck, Henderson lashed out with the staff to give Jamie a warning whack across one shin as well.

“You stand out of this, lad.”

“*Buckets of blood!*” Jamie swore, grabbing at a bridge cable and hopping on the other foot. Henderson turned his attention back to Euan.

"Speak so I can hear ye, you mucky tink," Henderson growled.

"I ken. I won't set foot on Inverfearnie! I won't use the bridges here!"

Henderson glanced up at Ellen.

"You see that he doesn't, girl."

She nodded without speaking, still clutching me.

Henderson threw his prey to his knees. I heard Euan gasp. Pinkie whined and shrank—heavens, what a useless dog. The river watcher cracked two more fearsome blows over the back of Euan's shoulders with his cromach, and when Euan slumped forward, Henderson gave him a kick in the ribs for good measure.

"Remember it, wee man. I'll arrest you *and* I'll knock your teeth in if I get another call from the librarian about you."

Sergeant Angus Henderson straightened up, resurrected his bicycle, and pointed it back in the direction of Brig O'Fearn village.

Ellen let go of me quickly.

I couldn't *believe* how fast this had happened, and how disorganized we'd been—how *helpless* in the face of authority and violence.

With a grunt of effort, Euan suddenly dragged himself erect to avoid the humiliation of me, or his sister, swooping down on him in concern.

The Water Bailiff tucked his staff under one arm and did an odd little balancing act as he turned back to us and doffed his hat, the way he'd done when I'd met him with Mary. He didn't look at me, but reproached Jamie gruffly: "I've warned you before about running wild, young Jamie, and I've a mind to have a word with your lady mother about the company you keep."

Then off he went.

Ellen leaped to Euan's side. I wanted to touch him, too. I wanted to see if he was all right. If Jamie had taken a beating like that he'd have let me peel off his shirt and mop his broken skin with clear burn water, but I couldn't do that for Euan McEwen; and Ellen wouldn't do it with us watching. I stood clenching and unclenching my fists in frustration as they inefficiently checked the damage.

"Och, it's nae bother," Euan said breathlessly. "I can walk. Friend of my dad's was beaten so bad by the police he lay in a ditch for a day before anyone found him. He couldn't work for two months. He hadn't even done anything—just made a racket singing on his way back to camp after a night in the pub."

"You haven't done anything, either!" I exclaimed.

"I'm lucky." Euan winced and shrugged.

"Come along back to Mammy," Ellen said to him, and Jamie and I watched them go, Ellen with a supporting arm around her brother's waist; just as Jamie and I would have been if it had happened to us.

But of course it wouldn't happen to us. The Water Bailiff had told Jamie to stay out of it. He hadn't even dared to look in my direction.

6. *Finding out what a precognition is*

Late in the afternoon I dived into Frank's study, without knocking, because otherwise I'd have had to hang about in the passage, and the older people would have been sure to tell me off for unchaperoned mixing with the contractor. But I had an idea for doing Euan a good turn and I thought Frank could help. My God! You have to be cunning as a vixen to get anything out of *anyone*. I am afraid it is going to be like this for the rest of my life; I thought I might as well continue as I've begun. Davie Balfour wasn't going to get me anywhere, but the coquettishly eccentric Lady Julia might.

"I'm so sorry to interrupt—"

He jumped up from behind his desk with a smile like sunlight breaking through cloud: winning, warm, swift, and honest. He was glad to see me. He could have been annoyed, but he was obviously delighted, and made me a spontaneous bow. It was elegant and natural and made my heart leap in a perfectly embarrassing way.

But the heat rising to my cheeks also warned me to be careful. I *knew* I was smitten with him, and that we were already more intimate than anyone in the house was aware, and I knew I had to hide it. I really couldn't imagine how Mother and Solange would react just then if they felt I was flirting with an older man.

He remembered my public name, tentatively formal.

"Miss Beaufort-Stuart! Can I help you?"

"You absolutely can," I said. "At least, I think you can. Do you need any more casual laborers? I wondered if you'd be able to offer work to the Traveller lad who took me to the hospital. Just for a few weeks, perhaps on an hourly wage? Helping to dig the pool or something like that? He's camped at Inchfort Field, and I rather owe him a favor. And Granddad always gave the Travellers jobs when they stopped here."

Francis Dunbar leaned against the edge of his desk. He folded his arms and considered, not looking at me. "There's plenty of digging to be done on the pipeline out to the Tay. I can certainly make it happen. But I'm afraid my foreman won't be very welcoming. Those Traveller folk don't use clocks—just turn up when it suits them. And things have already gone missing from the building site."

"Yes, I know your foreman thinks the Travellers are light-fingered. But you can give Euan a *chance*, can't you?"

Frank nodded absently. It seemed to me that every move Francis Dunbar made was a little absent, as if he were preoccupied with a burden of work and worry that constantly pressed on his brain like a concussion.

I hated to give him more to think about.

And all the time I was fearfully aware of how striking was his silhouette against the long midsummer evening's warm light in the open window.

He turned to look at me at last.

"Canny *and* kind," he said. "I'll have a word with Mr. Munro."

"Kind yourself," I said. And because he was perched there on the edge of the desk, closer to my level than when he was on his feet, I dared, spontaneously, to give him a little kiss on the cheek. "Thank you."

He didn't move or say a thing. When I stood back we looked each other eye to eye.

What's your proper work, Julie? I would like to be a theatrical escape artist, I think, like Houdini, or a circus owner like Bertram Mills. I want to dazzle people and be applauded for it. I am good at it, and it is thrilling. Walking a tightrope when you've had too much to drink, dangerous and wonderful.

So I gave him another kiss, on the mouth this time, and he let me. I could feel his lips moving beneath mine as he responded very gently, just for a moment.

Then I felt myself reddening.

So I stopped.

I really shouldn't have done it.

But—but I felt I'd restored both my authority and my feminine charm. How *powerful* it made me feel. It reminded me, actually, of my very first driving lesson in Mother's sports car—the thrill of holding all that energy in my feet, of knowing that my small person was harnessing all that magnificent strength—that is how I felt now. How quick-witted and alluring and *powerful*!

"You'd better go," he said gently.

"So I had."

He didn't tell me I shouldn't have done it, though.

Our suppers were all cold now unless it was soup or we dined out, because it was so much easier to prepare and tidy up a cold meal ourselves from the distant kitchen. Solange had been doing the running, as the youngest of the grown-ups, but now that I was better I was able to help. In a couple of the overstuffed Queen Anne chairs ruined by jubilant Victorian upholstery, Mémère and Jamie sat tight doing nothing, Mémère because she is the Dowager Countess of Strathfearn, and Jamie because he is a boy. But as the morning room faces east and is dull in the evening, even during the long light of midsummer with the tall windows open, Jamie got up to switch on a lamp.

It was just as I was coming back into the room after a trip made to sweep away the remains of our supper. When the light went on as I

crossed the threshold, I noticed a corner of brown paper peeping out from under the edge of the faded Persian carpet close to the door to the passage.

I set down the tea tray I'd been carrying and slid the paper out from under the carpet. For a moment I found myself staring in bewilderment at what I thought was the same brown envelope that had been haunting me ever since I arrived at Strathfearn House: there on the back was the engraved name and address, "Dr. Hugh Housman of the Ashmolean Museum."

But this was a different envelope. It was sealed and had never been opened.

I turned it over. It was addressed to "Mlle. Solange Lavergne."

He must have pushed it underneath the door while it had been closed, but hadn't realized that his note had slipped beneath the carpet on the other side. If it hadn't been for the switched-on lamp suddenly spotlighting it as I walked in, we might never have seen the corner peeking out.

But now everyone saw me kneeling there staring at it. So there wasn't anything to do apart from hand it over to Solange.

I think we all felt the same feeling of dread in our stomachs as we watched her open it. Jamie actually shoved one of the chairs behind her to act as a sort of aerial artiste's safety net, expecting a collapse when she got to the end of whatever she was reading.

It came as expected.

"*Mon Dieu!*" Solange exclaimed, and fell into the chair in tears with her face in her hands, the crumpled letter pressed against her cheek as if it were a handkerchief.

Mother leaped to her side.

"Solange, darling, whatever is it!"

"*It's my fault,*" Solange sobbed in French. "*All my fault.*"

"What's your fault?" Mother gasped.

"Monsieur Housman has taken his own life, killed himself! I—I told you we fought, but not—not *how* we fought. I struggled with him—I struck him in the face; I broke his spectacles."

Well. Solange confessing to the broken spectacles explained and confirmed a great deal.

She didn't give anyone a chance to respond, though; just tore on with guilty and miserable sobs: "And because I was sulking upstairs I was not here to meet Julia when she came home from school, so perhaps it is my fault she was hurt, as well—oh! *I should be arrested.*"

Needless to say, the rest of us were now quite helpless with astonishment.

My nanny raised large and beautiful dark tear-filled eyes, despairing, and I tried desperately to comfort her.

"You know I saw him, Solange," I said. "I saw him standing in the

burn and his glasses *were* broken, but he was fine. So you had already struck him then—" I remembered his swollen eye—yes, it had had time to swell; there must have been time between when she hit him and when I saw him. But not much, because he hadn't cleaned the blood from his upper lip...or maybe his nose had started to bleed afresh. At any rate..." "He wasn't trying to kill himself! He was fishing for pearls. Whatever happened to him after that, it couldn't have been your fault!"

"He was not himself—he might have been passing the time until the Tay tide came up, waiting to let the river take him! He says so right here! He says the river is more constant than any lover—that he is returning to the river because—" She bent her head, sobbing, and then read aloud: "The river's gifts are more eternal than the fleeting gifts of the flesh—" Another sob. "He begs me to forgive him."

I wanted very much to twitch the letter out of her hand and read it myself, but I didn't dare.

"Nanny." I put my arms around her.

I don't know if I was more shocked at her confession that *she'd struck a man*, or that she'd been so entangled with a man that she'd had to strike him. Dear *Solange*? A man who'd then been so distraught he'd gone and *drowned himself*?

Mother was not so sympathetic as I might have expected.

"Suicides must be reported *properly* to the police. The Procurator Fiscal must be notified; he's supposed to investigate sudden deaths. There may be an inquiry. It won't be a matter of poking about on the riverbank or writing to the man's colleagues and family. There will be proper police interviews all round, yourself included. Are you *sure*, Solange?"

Solange handed her the note. Mother waved me and Jamie away in irritation as we crowded in on both sides of her to try to read along. Colette stood behind our grandmother with her hands on Mémère's shoulders; we all knew how much Mémère dreaded a thorough police investigation in her house. But she just sat like a statue beneath the electric lamp, stoic and calm.

There were too many of us in the room. Mother told us sharply, "Go outside, the pair of you."

Jamie stepped out the open French doors and crossed the terrace to lean against the stone railing, waiting for the storm to calm. I followed him. We felt terrible for Solange, but also I think we were both a little embarrassed.

"It's so still when the work stops," Jamie said irrelevantly, looking out over the lawn. "Makes it feel a bit like it's summer ten years ago."

"But not really. Because the grounds weren't covered with diggers and wheelbarrows and tips full of concrete when we were little."

I sat down on the terrace railing.

"I suppose we'd better not show Nanny the piece of Dr. Housman's specs you found this morning," I said. "It would just cause more

hysterics.”

“We’ll have to show the police, though.”

Something occurred to me.

“What happened to the rest of his clothes?” I asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Hugh Housman wasn’t wearing any clothes when I saw him. The McEwens found his cap; and I saw him lose it, so that makes sense. Where are the clothes he was wearing when he left the door open at the Inverfearnie Library? Why’d he take them off to drown himself, anyway?”

Jamie thought for a moment. Finally he said quietly, “Don’t tinkers collect old clothes? Sheep’s wool and coal and old clothes?”

“You’re not the least bit funny!”

“I wasn’t trying to be funny.”

We looked at each other, and I knew what he was thinking. The McEwens were in for it.

Now began a time of protracted gloom and torrential rain. It was heralded by Inspector Duncan Milne, the policeman who’d been appointed by the Procurator Fiscal to grill us all about Housman’s declaration of intent to drown himself. This time he didn’t warn us he was coming. When he turned up at Strathfearn House no one answered the wide-open door, and no one heard him when he shouted. He stomped back out to his car and sat leaning over the driver and blasting on the horn until Jamie and I came tearing out to see what was going on.

The police took their time getting out of the car, the driver opening the door for Inspector Duncan Milne and for Angus Henderson, whom they’d brought along in the back. Then they all lined up facing me and Jamie, as though we were about to begin a football match. Both other men were rather dwarfed by Sergeant Henderson. They looked faintly absurd lined up against the dripping roses in the French garden.

Inspector Milne stepped forward. He raised his peaked cap and nodded to me. But it was Jamie he addressed, in a cool, dry voice: “Mr. Beaufort-Stuart? Your mother, Lady Craigie, is in, I hope? I’ve been appointed to make a precognition for the Procurator Fiscal.”

“What’s that?” Jamie drawled amiably, hands in his pockets, every inch the Earl of Craigie’s son. “The precognition, I mean.”

The dry, thin man looked him up and down indifferently. “Mere gathering of facts,” he explained. “At this time, we’re interviewing known witnesses. No formal statement is needed yet. The Procurator Fiscal may refer to the precognition to make a ruling as to cause of death, or to determine if a hearing is necessary.” He paused patiently, as if this were an explanation he gave on a regular basis and he knew he had to wait a moment or two before it stuck. Then he finished, “It’s

principally Lady Craigie and her maid with whom I'd like to speak today, though I understand Lady Julia has remembered a few more details. There will be an interview with Miss Kinnaird tomorrow. Mr. Dunbar was kind enough to come into our premises this morning."

"Julie, can you get Mother? And Solange," Jamie suggested neutrally. "I'll show these gentlemen in."

Inspector Duncan Milne of the Perthshire and Kinross-shire Constabulary established himself in Frank Dunbar's study. My own session with him went very quickly; all he wanted was for me to add a description of Dr. Housman's state of undress to my original interview. Jamie, of course, had nothing to say except that he'd found the piece of Housman's spectacles. He hadn't even been at Strathfearn when Dr. Housman first went missing.

While the interviews were going on, Sergeant Henderson stood guard to prevent anyone trying to eavesdrop through the door in the corridor. Mémère posted Colette to stand guard outside *our* door next along the corridor so that no one could eavesdrop there, either, and after Milne had finished with me and Jamie, this arrangement of course allowed us to eavesdrop through the folding wall in the morning room. Mémère provided us with the glass tumblers necessary to amplify the sound through the paneling. Mother sat *like Patience on a monument*, staring out over the wet terrace, trying to pretend the eavesdropping wasn't happening.

It was nearly as good as listening to a BBC radio play on the wireless. We couldn't quite hear the police inspector's questions, but to begin with he had his assistant read aloud the whole of Housman's pathetic letter to Solange. The policeman's halting matter-of-fact voice uttering this tragic statement gave it the faintest taste of farce, and as Jamie and I listened, I could see my own astonishment mirrored in his face. In our wildest dreams I don't think we could have ever imagined our dear nanny entangled with *anyone*; and *what* a splendid entanglement this had been!

"My sweet Solange," the officer read. "It has broken my heart that you are so im..."—he coughed in embarrassment—"...*immoveable*, that you have so little belief in me. I swear I can give you no answers, no details, no measure of my worth. I can only give my promise. How I long to be able to offer more than a mere promise! But if you cannot take my hand on trust alone, there is no other woman"—another choke of embarrassment—"no other woman alive to whom I would ever turn."

The officer plunged on:

"I so longed for a new life with you—I cannot bear to think it cannot be—"

Here, Mémère, growing impatient at our enraptured listening faces when she couldn't hear what was going on herself, hissed, "What are they saying?" and Jamie actually shushed her.

"...What new worlds we could have known together, how different,

how empty my own new world will be when I enter it alone...”—and so forth. “And now, I return to the river I know so well, where you know you can find me, the river whose gifts are—”

I thought the poor constable fellow was going to choke himself with the clearing of his throat it took to gird his loins for reading the end of the letter.

“The river whose gifts are more eternal than the fleeting gifts of the *flesh*. I beg you to forgive me”—harrumph—“*my darling*.”

Dr. Housman had signed it “Your Hugh.”

Nanny put on an excellent performance.

She was as chilly and poised and regal as Mary Queen of Scots on trial. Though Inspector Milne was irritatingly low-voiced, we were able to judge by Solange’s answers that he asked her all the expected questions about where and when we’d found the note, and if she recognized Hugh Housman’s cap and the broken piece of his spectacles, and whether she had reason to believe Housman was of volatile character. But it was when Milne started prying into the nature of her, ah, *friendship* with the scholar that she truly shone like a star.

SOLANGE [frostily]: I am *offended* at your suggestion that our liaison was not proper. We are not *children*, Inspector Milne, exchanging sordid kisses in the darkness of the cinema! [Sound of nose-blowing into a presumably lace-edged imported French handkerchief.] Dr. Housman was a fluent speaker of the French language.

INSPECTOR DUNCAN MILNE: [mutter, mutter, snort]

SOLANGE: [sulking silence]

INSPECTOR MILNE [in loud tones, apologetic]: Perhaps, Mademoiselle Lavergne, you do not understand the significance of your friendship with Dr. Housman in the event there need be a hearing at Sheriff Court as to the nature of his death.

SOLANGE [loudly]: I understand its *significance* perfectly. I could not hear your question.

INSPECTOR MILNE [just as loudly]: Was there an exchange of physical affection between you?

SOLANGE [with queenly chill]: It would have been a poor affair if there had not.

(“One for the French!” Jamie hissed in my ear, and I had to smack him because he made me snigger inappropriately and miss Milne’s response. Mémère threatened in a stage whisper that she would not let us be her spies if we couldn’t do it quietly.) Then:

SOLANGE:...Between us, yes, not secretly, but in *private*. And the physical exchange of affection does not prove itself only in the touch of bodies, Inspector Milne. There are other small kindnesses a person can do to show affection. I saw to it there were always fresh flowers in his room at the day's end. He made me a gift of a pair of earrings, pearls he'd found himself in the river here—he had them set at MacGregor's.

(Of course all of this took place before *I* arrived at Strathfearn. I feel sure that if I'd been here I would have sniffed out the romantic hanky-panky sooner than Mummy, possibly preventing the fatal tiff.)

"And yet you feel Dr. Housman may have had reason to end his life, as this letter to you suggests?" came the dry, relentless voice of the interviewing police inspector.

"We fought," Solange said simply. "And I do not mind saying why. He tried to turn me against my dear Lady Craigie; and he made remarks about her mother, Lady Strathfearn, which I found coarse and tasteless; about her age and her sanity, criticizing the way she has run the estate since her husband's death—"

Jamie and I, face-to-face as we listened through the folding wall, caught each other's eye at exactly the same moment in silent agreement not to pass this insulting gossip on to our grandmother.

"I was angry and did not speak to him for several days. When he approached me he made no apology, and I found his physical advances"—she struggled for a word and came up with—"inappropriate. After more rebuffs than I can count he took my lack of response for coyness, and when he would not stop, I struck him."

She paused, then added remorsefully, "I struck him quite hard."

"How hard?"

"I broke his spectacles."

"Ah. That was the last you saw of him, was it?"

At this point Solange lost control of her carefully maintained hauteur, and burst into loud tears, and began theorizing rather hysterically as to what might have happened to *me*, which really did not count as factual information pertinent to a precognition. And her interview came to an end.

Then it was Mother's turn.

She was queenly in a different way to Solange. She had none of Solange's frost or magnificence; Mother was simply in control. She stood up and let Sergeant Henderson escort her next door without the least fuss or drama. Jamie and I had our ears pressed to the glass tumblers against the wood paneling the second the door to the passage had closed behind her.

"Please sit, Lady Craigie." Inspector Milne was as dry as ever. This time, irritatingly, it was Mother who spoke in such a low voice that we

couldn't make out her answers. Of course that was because she was wise to us. After quite a lot of unintelligible mumbling from them both, Jamie rolled his eyes at me and put his tumbler down on the floor.

So I was the only one who was listening when the Inspector, quite clearly, asked my mother an absolutely outrageous question.

"Is your daughter intact?"

It was like being brutally smacked across the face. I felt myself burning with indignation. Just the *asking* of it made me feel filthy, and I wasn't even in the room.

Mother's voice went up, too. "*Really*, Inspector Milne, I fail to see what such a thing has to do with Housman's *death*."

"Your daughter was the last to see him alive. She recalls that he was fully unclothed when she met him, alone on the riverbank, and she can remember nothing of the night she then spent in the company of the travelling tinkers. What happened to her in those hours, or *what she did*, is surely of relevance to this investigation. I want to know if you are aware of any misfortune she may have encountered that is not yet on record. Was she not examined in the hospital?"

Mother didn't say anything for a moment.

She thought Jamie was listening, which was partly why she was embarrassed about answering the question.

But something in her absolute silence made me aware that yes, medical staff had checked me over very carefully in the two days I'd been unconscious, and Mother knew what they'd been looking for and what they'd found, and hadn't told me.

I tried to imagine my senseless anonymous stripped self in that hospital bed behind the rail curtain, being *examined* for signs of *assault*. And felt violated even though I hadn't been.

"It's a delicate question," the dry man acknowledged, prompting her. "Was there evidence of an attack of a sexual nature?"

Mother spoke with the presence of an advocate defending a case.

"Notwithstanding his courtship with Mam'selle Lavergne, Dr. Housman was a respectable and temperate man, and I have no reason to believe he would have assaulted my daughter."

"I was not thinking of him. I was thinking of the tinker family with whom she spent the night."

I felt my face incandescent with embarrassment, and no small amount of horror at how the Inspector's mind was painting the McEwens.

But Mother never lost her sangfroid. After a moment she said aloud and clearly, in a voice of frost pitched for me to hear because she *knew* I was listening, "Whatever Housman may have had in mind when he removed his clothes for the last time, Inspector Milne, you will never hear me speak ill of Jean McEwen's people."

"It's possible young Euan's the one who struck her," said the policeman.

“I positively don’t believe it,” Mother said firmly.

Inspector Milne went back to muttering and mumbling, finishing with, “Perhaps your daughter interrupted a rendezvous.”

The next thing I heard was Mother saying explosively, “Of course it wasn’t Solange who struck her!”

Milne raised his voice in response.

“We have to consider that your lady’s maid admits to relations with Dr. Housman, and to doing him violence,” Milne pointed out drily. “And she has no alibi.”

...an + want Sandy's job, stuck in a museum at
people speaking to me in foreign languages to kee
as about everything I see." "Will your folk let yo
at I'm almost old enough to be married; but I'
my people discuss it behind my back." I realize
one tried to arrange a marriage for me. I didn'
hills across the valley." "See King's Seat? Just i
's supposed to be one of the old's forebears.
post. "Don't you have a memory of Macbeth." Sh
ay: we're half the way up Pitbroomie Hill anyway
'l right here for a wee while, aye?" So we got ou
son that the Magnette hadn't made it up the hil
ble to talk (I was, at any rate). But it was love
he again, I sang: "Now the summer's in its prim
ountain thyme—" "—All the moorland is perfu
her, and sang the whole thing at the tops of ou
he track over the moor that was ours by right o
I thought, just then and fleetingly, there wasn'
be with. If I could have chosen one moment of m
that one. We came over the summit of Pitbroomie

Part 2

WHAT HAPPENED

11-23 JULY 1938

7. *We don't ken half what's buried in the peat*

The rain continued, rather unbelievably, for some two weeks. Solange was not arrested for anything, but she was sure she was going to be, and spent so much time sniffing into Mémère's endless supply of lace-edged handkerchiefs that she spread a cloud of gloom everywhere she went. The uncertainty was hard to live with.

Jamie attempted escape. He first went back to Inchfort Field to deliver Frank Dunbar's (or rather, my) offer of a digging job to Euan McEwen, but Mother wouldn't let me out with the river running so high and fast and the path so muddy and slippery. Then Jamie went every day.

He'd always surreptitiously primp a bit before he set off, suddenly cleaning his teeth or running his fingers through his hair with a quick glance in Mémère's dressing table mirror.

"What do you *do* up at Inchfort Field all day?" I asked crossly. "Crouch in a tent in the rain weaving willow baskets?"

"I talk to Ellen."

I was very jealous.

But all I could do was sit with Mémère and Colette and the miserable Solange in the torrential gloom of the morning room, sorting china and table linen and three generations' worth of French novels.

My blasted trunk still wasn't here, and the Schiaparelli blouse Jamie brought from home wasn't really suitable for such dusty work, so I got him to fetch me all the frayed and faded summer clothing abandoned in the nursery bathroom. Sandy's outgrown athletic shorts came down to my knees; his kilt had to be double-lapped and pinned around my waist. I was quite desperate not to let Frank catch sight of me in drag as Davie Balfour: with my shorn hair I looked very like a Bohemian thirteen-year-old boy, and to be seen as such would have ruined all my credibility as an aspiring debutante.

Jamie went back and forth to Inchfort so often that he and Ellen *missed each other* when she came to the Big House herself one morning.

She first came to the front door; which would have been entirely inappropriate a year ago, but this year nobody even bothered to answer the bell. So then she came around to the terrace at the back, even less appropriate, and knocked on the French windows of the morning room.

I leaped to meet her. "Come in! Oh—"

She shook her head. She wouldn't come in.

I stepped outside into the drizzle. I hadn't seen her, or any of the McEwens, since that terrible day at the library.

We stood about a yard apart, looking at each other.

"I'm sorry about Mary Kinnaird," I said. I hadn't seen Mary since that day, either; I didn't know how to face Mary.

"You've got your granddad's eyes but not his say in matters," Ellen commented drily.

"Is Euan all right?"

"Aye, nae bother.' So he says. He's going to take the work you've offered him, helping to dig that pipeline in the riverbed for the Glenfearn School. But they've told him not to come till it stops raining."

"Come in and talk to me," I begged. "You talk to my brother all the time."

"I'm drookit. I'll drip all over your gran's fine carpet."

"I'll go around to the front with you and you can go in there. It's all painters and dust cloths in every room but this one. No one will care if you drip."

We walked around to the front of the house in silence. I wondered why she'd come.

"Looking for Jamie, are you?" I asked as we entered the reception hall.

Out of the rain now, she pushed the damp hair back from her face and straightened her skirt. She gave a little laugh.

"Are you jealous of your brother?"

I frowned. I was, a little—of his healthy independence and maybe, a little, of his being able to sit and do nothing while I ran the supper dishes to the kitchen. But something about the way she'd asked the question gave a different twist to her meaning.

"Well, *are* you looking for him?" I asked impatiently.

She gave a dismissive shrug. "Any of you will do. I wondered if you could mend things with the librarian a bit. Euan promised the Water Bailiff not to set foot on Inverfearnie Island, but that means he has to go round by the village at Brig O'Fearn to get here to the Big House for the work you've offered him."

"It's ten miles by road that way!"

"Isn't it! I don't suppose you thought of that when you were playing Lady of the Manor, finding him work?"

"Look: he doesn't have to do it," I said hotly. "I thought it might help. Why are you stopping here anyway? You won't harvest the flax for another three weeks at least. Didn't you all go to Blairgowrie for the strawberry picking while I was in the hospital? There's berries all over Perthshire just now. You could go away and come again in August. Maybe you *should* go away. Otherwise everyone will just figure out a way to blame you for Dr. Housman's suicide somehow."

"You've mucked it up with your bountiful job offer. It's not as easy to move on as it was: the Council authorities keep closing off old camping greens. You turn up and it's all posted 'Keep Out' with barbed wire all

over. So Mummy wants Euan to do the work here. He'll get three times as much as he would at a day's berry picking. And that gives Dad one long last chance at Fearn river pearls."

Then Ellen made a sound like *hnnph* that rather stopped me being able to respond. I sat down on the bottom step of the old oak staircase.

Ellen didn't sit. She gazed down at me with that look of cold challenge and asked, "So how shall you mend it? I expect you'll send your chauffeur round to collect Euan first thing the morning the rain stops."

I knew that was Traveller sarcasm, but I still found myself retorting defensively, "There isn't a chauffeur at Strathfearn any longer. You know my grandmother had to let her staff go."

"And have you found other work for them, too? No, that's no' your business. Or even hers. And why would she need a chauffeur when your mother drives her own car—?"

Her face suddenly lit with amusement.

"Ask your lady mother to bring Euan round here when the rain stops," Ellen said. "Tell her it's because of you he needs the ride and see what she says."

Blast her: she knew I couldn't do that.

Or—I *could*, of course. And Mummy would likely do it, quite graciously, out of obligation and apology. But it was blackmail. It wasn't as if Mother hadn't anything to do all day other than work on a matched set of needlework cushion covers for the twenty-four eighteenth-century dining-room chairs that were being auctioned at Sweet's. She was closing down a country estate for her nearly eighty-year-old mother, in the swift aftermath of her father's lingering and debt-ridden illness.

"It's nothing to do with my mother," I said.

"That's true," Ellen agreed. "Well, then, *you* do it. You bring Euan round in your mother's car."

I sat silent, glowering at her. She returned my stare coolly. Of course the simplest thing to do would be to go and try to make peace with Mary. I wished that didn't also feel like the *hardest* thing to do.

Then Ellen said, "I expect you dinnae ken how to drive."

"*I can drive*," I said.

Mummy *had* given me a handful of useful lessons in her racy little Magnette, but the last time was at Christmas.

"She'll test me before she lets me take it on my own. I'd need to practice...." I spoke through my teeth, trying to piece together a plan that would put me behind the driving-wheel of Mummy's car—preferably without having to steal it—the next morning if necessary. "I haven't been allowed out this week—"

Ellen rolled her eyes. "You're like a flipping princess."

I sat pouting, torn between feeling affronted and rebellious. Ellen got out her tobacco pouch and lit her pipe while she waited for me to come

to a decision. There was no one about at the moment, but it felt very clandestine. I watched her with envy—not at the pipe’s existence, but at her sure and casual confidence in lighting it. She wasn’t thinking about it, what it would look like as she smoked, or whether or not anyone would care. She was just being *herself*.

“*I’ll do it*,” I said.

Ellen blew out a slow stream of smoke and then laughed.

“Just for a wee while, till we find some other way for him to get here. Our uncle has a push bike he can borrow maybe. Or our cousins the Camerons might help; they’re coming to Bridge Farm to help with the flax, and they have a van. That’s how we got you to the hospital.”

She smoked calmly, finishing her pipe.

“Has your Dad found any more trace of Dr. Housman?” I asked. “His clothes?”

“Not a thing.”

“And the police—have they been round again since Solange found that note?”

“Oh yes. Wanting to poke through every piece of rag we have with us.”

“I’m worried they’ll try to arrest somebody.”

“*Somebody*? Euan? Aye. Mammy and Daddy have been raging about whether we should get away from that. But the police have no reason to arrest anybody—they stood right in front of us trying to find a reason, and they couldn’t. Mammy told ’em she’d haul the Water Bailiff into Sheriff Court herself for beating Euan—of course she won’t, I dinnae think she *could*. But Euan bothering the librarian a wee while has nothing to do with the missing scholar, and that beating makes the hornies look bad. And if we pack up and leave the day, it’ll look like Euan *did* do something, when none of us have done a thing. And—”

She put the pipe away.

“And Strathfearn will defend us. Your gran. Your mam. You and your Lady Bountiful playacting. Mammy thinks we’re safer here than running.”

“Well, my brother Sandy will defend you, too. He’ll be here soon—you’ll like him.”

“He’s the one got thrashed for nosing about the log boat, aye?” Ellen said. “Runs in the family! You know your granddad tried to dig that log boat out of the riverbank when he was a young man—my own granddad helped him. They had a team of men and horses working on it. But it goes too far into the peat, and they were damaging it. So he left it there for the tide to work at.”

She knew the damndest things about Strathfearn.

“I bet Sandy will want to look at the log boat again before we leave for good,” I said. “Like you looking at the Reliquary. One last time. Just to make sure it’s still there.”

“Och, there’s sure to be something else for him to find someday,” Ellen said. “We don’t ken half what’s buried in the peat.”

And as we spoke, it occurred to me that *right now* she knew more about the Murray Collection than anyone else in the house.

I stood up. “It’s raining anyway and you’re not doing much, are you? Come with me and let’s see if they left anything behind when they moved the Murray Hoard to the Inverfearnie Library.”

Ellen laughed. “Oh, aye, Lady Julia. Show off your estate.”
“Oh, *come on*.”

I was starting to see that she laughed and poked fun when she was actually quite interested.

Selfishly pleased to have her to myself, I took Ellen all over Strathfearn House, nosing into every single room we found that wasn’t locked. It was a good deal more freedom than I’d ever had there before; of course my brothers and I weren’t ever allowed to nose into the guest bedrooms and the gun room and the billiard room. There wasn’t anything of interest in any of them now, mostly bare except for the furniture and paintings marshalled together in unappealing ranks in the former drawing room and the Long Hall, all labeled for auction.

We lingered in the tower room where Granddad’s museum had been. His glass cabinets all stood there empty, gathering dust and dead flies.

By sheer coincidence Ellen and I spoke together, and we both said the exact same thing.

“This makes me sad.”

We turned to look at each other. After a moment Ellen gave a single nod.

We peered out the cobwebbed windows. From this high room, there was a clear view of the ruined towers of Aberfearn Castle, soaring above the birches where the Fearn meets the Tay.

“Did you work with Granddad here, in this room?” I asked.

“We mostly worked in his study when I was drawing. But I went up and down the stairs for him, fetching things from the cabinets sometimes.”

“He gave you the *keys*?”

“Aye, he did that,” Ellen said with straightforward pride.

“Gosh. You *are* lucky. Did he pay you?”

“Och, I wouldn’t have taken money from him. He taught me all about typological dating. And he gave me Pinkie.”

Ellen walked over to the cabinet that used to hold the wonderful little black-and-silver cup.

“You asked about the pearls in the Reliquary,” Ellen said. “Look here.”

She knelt on the floor by the empty cabinet. The boards were old wide planks of smooth dark wood. They didn’t quite lie flat against each other; in one or two places the cracks between them were nearly half an

inch wide. Ellen laid her index finger against one of the gaps, pointing.

"You can only see from here," she said, moving over to let me kneel beside her. "Get close to the floor and look along the gap where I'm pointing."

I bent over, pressed against Ellen's thigh, and saw the hidden pearl.

It looked like a little lost moon, wedged tight in the gap. It must have dropped in and rolled into place. I could just poke the tip of my pinkie finger in and feel its cool smoothness there. But it was stuck fast.

"Strathfearn showed me," Ellen said. "It's the last of the Reliquary pearls. I tried to pick it out with hairpins and whatnot, but it wants to stay."

"Did he tell you how it got there? Or what happened to the rest of them?"

"He didn't like to talk about them. They made him sad; I think he'd sold them, or was thinking about selling them...and then regretted not keeping them together with the Reliquary. I never saw the rest."

She turned her head to look at me.

"This one..." Her tone was matter-of-fact, but her voice was quiet. "Your granddad said it was put there long ago by a wee girl playing about with them like marbles."

"Oh."

I stared back at her in amazement.

"He must have meant *me*."

"Likely he did," she said drily. She didn't ever seem to get excited about *anything*.

But I hadn't made those pearls up. I hadn't imagined them. They'd been real.

I closed my eyes, my finger resting on the cool surface of the pearl I could never play marbles with again. And even though I knew now that the Reliquary pearls had been real, it was still like an image from a dream: the black cup brimming with milky pearls, dove-gray and dove-pink, all different sizes: a little galaxy of gleaming planets in a small shadowy celestial sphere.

I woke up in the middle of that night feeling haunted. The clouds had temporarily cleared, and there was a round silver moon sailing high in a bottle-blue sky and bathing everything with otherworldly light. The moonlight fell right across my face, and once I was awake I couldn't go back to sleep. I padded very silently to Mémère's dressing table and found a nail file, and then sat on my bed in the fairy glow of the moon for a while, giving myself a manicure and thinking of all the people who had lived and died in that house in its hundred years. Granddad actually *was born and died in that very room*.

But I wasn't feeling haunted by Granddad—or even by the miserable

Dr. Housman. I was suddenly, sharply, overwhelmingly aware of all Strathfearn's quiet, hidden, ancient past—my vanished medieval great-grandparents who left behind the empty, towering halls of Aberfearn Castle—and *their* vanished great-grandparents, who carved the stare-eyed fish on the standing stones that were already old; and the folk before them who left nothing but strange green mounds and iron blades; and those who built the buried boat and raised the walking stones.

I thought: Their blood runs in my veins. They are alive in me.

But that made me feel even creepier, as though my very self were part ghost. I could just imagine how Ferdinand felt, shipwrecked in *The Tempest*, where *the isle is full of noises*.

All those people who lived here before us—their ghosts *belong* here. But Hugh Housman's doesn't. It is surely an unquiet ghost.

*Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes....*

Mémère interrupted my rhapsody by asking me crossly, in French, to stop filling the isle with noise (the very quiet noise of buffing my nails), so I put on my school blazer over my nightgown and went downstairs. I opened the French doors to the glorious moon. But I also switched on the lamp to banish the ghosts, and after a while it started to get buggy. The moths battering against the lamp shade were both annoying and a bit spooky. I put out the light and sat in the dark for a while longer with the doors open, to give the insects a chance to leave. Then I closed the doors and went back upstairs.

And then I lay awake for another twenty minutes wondering whether or not I'd bolted the doors.

This was wholly irrational. What in the world was I worrying about? Bolts don't keep out ghosts, and dead men won't come in on their own!

If you're scared, *do* something, Julie, I told myself. Go back down and check the bolts if you think it matters!

So, back into my school blazer and back down the staircase bloodied by the strange dark wines and indigos of moonlit stained glass—back along the inky oak-paneled corridor to the morning room. It was entirely still, apart from one imprisoned moth fluttering vainly against an upper windowpane. I stepped into the room.

The French doors suddenly shuddered as if they'd been caught in a tempest.

It would have been startling even if my nerves hadn't already been stretched to snapping. I didn't scream—I dived under the legs of the Queen Anne settee and cowered there in absolute mindless terror like a rabbit in the shadow of a hawk.

The door handle rattled with the sound of a skeleton dancing on a tile floor.

I had my brain back, though my heart was galloping, and I knew it wasn't a ghost. *What in the world—?*

The noise scared me nearly out of my skin. I'd thrown myself on the floor as if I'd been caught on the moor in a hail of gunshot. Now I didn't dare stand up. It was *that* kind of instinct: *Protect yourself, Julie.*

I peeked out under the settee, between its legs, and I could *see* the shadow at the door—bulky and shapeless—and the door handle rattled again, but indeed I had bolted it after all and it didn't open.

The dark silhouette stood there, just quiet, not moving, for another minute. I counted how long and it seemed to take forever. Then I saw it put up a hand and scratch its head. It reached toward the door again, then changed its mind and edged away.

I let out a little strangled laugh. There was something so very ordinary about the way this terrifying shadow had moved.

I heard the rattle of the door to Frank's office. Then there was no more noise. It couldn't have been a burglar—he didn't try to break in. (And I'm sure it wasn't a ghost.)

It was somebody checking the doors to see if they would open or not, but I don't know why.

If you're scared, do something—I gave myself another fierce lecture.

All in a rush, I ran at our door, unbolted it, and threw it open.

There was no one on the terrace. I stomped out into the moonlight and stood there defiantly in my nightgown and school blazer with bare feet cold against the damp stone, listening. I seemed to stand there for ages and heard nothing. Where on earth had he gone so quickly? Hiding below the steps to the lawn?

I didn't have the confidence to look. Words leaped into my head and I sang aloud, quavering and ridiculous:

*“My castle is aye my ain,
An' harried it ne'er shall be,
For I'll fall ere it's ta'en—
An' wha dare meddle wi' me?”*

“Julia!”

Mother had the French doors open in the room above. She was kneeling on my bed and leaning out the window to scold me.

“For goodness' sake, Julia, stop that racket and come to bed!”

“There was someone rattling the door out here!”

“There are watchmen all over the estate! You were down there with the lights on and the house wide open at two o'clock in the morning, waking your grandmother and all the rest of us right above you—of

course they're checking the doors!"

"Well, it scared me," I said petulantly. "I thought he might still be about. I didn't see him go."

"He'll have gone around to the front of the house. You won't frighten off intruders singing Border ballads! *Come to bed!*"

I wished quite suddenly I was tucked up in my narrow iron cot in the crowded room my grandfather was born and died in.

"But when I go back to the reception hall so I can come upstairs, whoever it is will be testing the front door...."

My voice was still quavering a little. Thank goodness Jamie was upstairs in his servant's garret; otherwise I'd never live down his mockery of my lack of fighting spirit.

"I'll come and get you," my mother said with resignation, as if I were ten years younger.

"I'll come myself," I said with dignity, bearing in mind the bold reputation of my glorious ancestors.

What a thing to be afraid of, I scolded myself; but I stood on a chair to bolt the terrace doors behind me at the top, too, when I came in. Nobody tried the front door.

I didn't think the shadow I'd seen had the look of a night watchman. He'd been missing something watchmanlike. Where was the torch, the inevitable cigarette, the peaked cap?

But that wasn't what was nagging at me; it had been something more fleeting.

Where was the *confidence*?

8. *Rather a lot of giving and taking*

The car conversation went something like this:

ME: Mother—would you let me drive your car, like you did at Christmas?

MUMMY: I expect so. But I haven't a great deal of time to teach you.

ME: I could go around the grounds, like Jamie and I do at home in the big car.

MUMMY: *I expect* so....

ME: And if you thought I wasn't too bad, I could take Euan to work. The Water Bailiff...[Here I inserted a list of unfair grievances against the McEwens in general and Euan in particular.] I wouldn't be going far. Just back and forth on the Perth Road between here and Inchfort Field, through Brig O'Fearn.

MUMMY: Hmmnn...you've not got a license for being on the road, darling.

ME: It's only one road and almost all through country. It's wide and flat all the way except the last bit of lane that leads down to the library, but that's never got traffic on it. And it would save the McEwens ever so much time and trouble.

MUMMY: I shall make you change the oil in it *yourself* to prove your commitment to the safety of my motor.

So I twisted Mother's arm enough to let me take her sedately up and down the drive in the Magnette the next day, in and out among the new dormitories, proving I was not a reckless idiot. It was still raining and we did not stay out for long, hurrying to get the open-topped car back under cover.

The grown-ups were trying to soldier on as usual and were pestering me about clothes that evening after the driving lesson with Mother. Solange in particular, trying to recover from her sordid past, wanted to see me looking like a respectable young lady again.

"We ought to buy Julia some everyday things, at least. Yours are too big for her, Madame," she told Mother.

"She has clothes!" Jamie said. "I brought all her favorite things down from Craig Castle!"

"The Schiaparelli blouse Lord Craigie will not allow her to appear in at dinner!" Solange exclaimed. "It is *sheer*. She has nothing to wear

benefit it. O Seignieur—imagine, in this house, with the workmen coming and going! And there is the Vionnet frock with the silver thread all down the front.”

“I do love that one, though,” Mother said. “It’s modest, but it makes her look very grown-up.”

I put in: “It would make *her* look silly on the river path if *she* wore it to visit Mary or the McEwens.”

Really, did we need to *argue* about getting me some decent clothes? When did we become so frugal?

“I bet the McEwens could get me something to wear,” I said. “They do a trade in old clothes.”

Mémère suddenly spoke up. “I have made you an appointment with my seamstress in Perth, Julia.”

“You need a party frock,” Mother reminded me. “For your birthday. Mrs. Menzies has very kindly offered to hold a ceilidh for you at Glenmoredun Castle after the grouse shoot on the Twelfth. It’s only a month off now. It won’t be big, but your father will come down—he’s going to let Davie manage the Craig Castle shoot, and I can’t be two places at once organizing things, and we *must* do something for your sixteenth. It’s always awkward your birthday falling on Opening Day.”

“Mother, whose fault is that?” Jamie teased.

It *was* awkward. I rarely got decent attention on my birthday, since everyone was always so focused on killing birds. A birthday dance at Glenmoredun Castle would be *marvelous*, especially after the gloom that had been shadowing us all summer—even if everyone was exhausted after tramping about on the moors all day. Very nice of Mrs. Menzies and her husband, the Laird of Moredun, though I am sure it was partly out of respect for Granddad and sympathy for Mémère. I had been looking forward to a grown-up frock *without* tartan ruffles on my sixteenth birthday, and sweeping my hair up in a French chignon like Mémère’s, since *forever*.

Oh, blast it, I thought, remembering. My hair. Blast and drat.

Well, there’s many a slip twixt the cup and the lip, for although I was determined to be a good girl when they took me into Perth to be measured (and I *was* looking forward to demanding powder-blue silk), the following day *again* I did something I ought not have done (and it had nothing to do with Mummy’s car).

That was the morning it finally stopped raining: the morning when Euan would start going to work digging on the pipeline for the new Glenfearn swimming pool. The sun was out for the first time in glory knows how long, and it was a stunningly and unexpectedly beautiful summer’s day, everything sparkling. There was only room for two in the Magnette, so Jamie couldn’t come along when I went to collect Euan. Instead, Jamie gallantly offered to help Mother escort Mémère and her entourage to Edinburgh again. I did not envy him that job.

My maiden voyage alone in my mother's car was actually so banal it is almost not worth mentioning. I crept so very carefully down the drive I never even dared shift out of low. Nor did I gather much speed on the Perth Road heading for Brig O'Fearn village. The lane to Inverfearnie Island comes off the main road and goes past Inchfort Field on its way to the library, and I passed Ellen McEwen on her way to the Boatman's Well laden with one of the big milk cans the McEwens use to fetch water. She had to stand pressed up against the hedge to let me pass, her almost-always-hostile stare full of disbelief.

I felt triumphant; but the lane was so narrow there I didn't dare let go of the driving-wheel to wave. I drove all the way down to Inverfearnie Island so I could turn around in the wide gravel drive in front of the library. I wasn't sure if Mary saw me, but I was still so mad at her that I didn't care.

When I parked by the field gate at Inchfort and climbed out of the car, Pinkie the dog came galloping to greet me.

"My own girl!" I cooed as she showered me with kisses.

Mrs. McEwen was out in front of their big camp tent, washing breakfast cups and plates in a white enamel tin tub. The baby—which I knew now to be Ellen and Euan's very junior adopted sister, the child of a cousin who'd died giving birth to her—was chortling away in a little willow basket nearby.

"I didn't bring you a present last time," I said. "So I did this time." I'd cut an armful of roses for Mrs. McEwen, the reddest reds and darkest pinks I could find. Knowing that we couldn't take them with us made us rather free with the cut flowers.

"The bonny things!" Jean McEwen shook the water from her hands and buried her nose in the velvety, scented blossom. "What beauties! Are these out of Lady Strathfearn's garden? Let me get the tea on; you'll need a cup of tea after your ride in the motorcar. We can put these in to soak when Ellen gets back—she's just fetching another can of water. Euan's away to the Big House."

"Oh! I wanted to give him a ride and spare him the long walk! Didn't Ellen tell you I was coming?"

I felt pretty sure she hadn't really believed I'd manage it.

"It's nae bother for Euan this morning—he rode in the cart with his uncle Hamish who's away to Perth peddling tin. We had a time getting the dog to stay behind, but it's no place for her among those dredgers! How kind of you to think on Euan. We've told him to meet you by the Strathfearn garages at day's end. No doubt he'd be glad of a lift home by then, and if you stop here the now you'll catch our Nell when she comes back."

Another, separate plan hatched itself beautifully in my brain. Meanly, it didn't include Jamie. Naughtily, it did include my mother's car.

"Maybe Ellen would like to go for a drive?"

"I should think she'll like that very much!"

Shaness, Julie, you are a devious wee temptress.

Of course she wanted to go for a drive. Who can resist a cherry-red two-seater open sports car?

I was waiting for Ellen at the gate when she got back with the water. I was sitting in the car, ready to go.

"I went to a lot of bother to come out here for Euan this morning," I said. "You might have told him to wait."

Her stony eyes glinted. "Oh, aye?" she responded noncommittally.

"Well, as I'm here anyway, you may as well come for a ride instead."

I could see she was ridiculously excited, and a little scared. I don't think Ellen McEwen realized how *obvious* all her emotions are.

"You can do the shifting, if you like," I said. "I'll put the clutch in and tell you when to move the stick."

"You're a radge dilly. Horn moich."

"I know what that means, you know."

"Oh, aye?" she repeated.

"A pure mad girl. So I am! Do you want to do the gears or not?"

"Let me just give Mammy this can. Wait for me."

It was a good lesson for both of us: it made me have to think even harder about getting the timing of clutch and stick right. I let her do it all the way out to the main road, slowing down and speeding up on purpose so she could practice.

Then I took over to drive carefully through Brig O'Fearn village and back to the gate lodge of Strathfearn House, and that was all I had permission to do. But—

But Mother was in Edinburgh and I was officially finished being convalescent, and I was still a little jealous of all the time that Jamie had spent with Ellen and I hadn't, and—

Suddenly all the sorrow and uncertainty that entwined our lives with Strathfearn dropped away from us both. We were nothing more than two lucky girls on a jolly holiday in a motorcar.

I swung around neatly in the lodge entrance to the driveway and headed back toward Brig O'Fearn. "Where are you going?" Ellen cried.

"Over Pitbroomie Hill to Glenmoredun Castle!"

It is only a little detour from Brig O'Fearn, only the next road over.

"Madwoman!" Ellen accused approvingly.

"I want to see what the moor looks like. They're shooting there soon. There must be grouse about—bet the car will scare the birds!"

"Do they need beaters for the shoot? Or loaders? Our men used to work the Opening Day shoot for Strathfearn."

"I'll ask Mother."

It occurred to me that Ellen and I must have had rather different views of Opening Day. Mine had always been, *This frenzied killing of birds interrupts my birthday but can be rather fun*. But to Ellen, it was just *work*.

And she added schemingly, but without the accusatory tone I'd come to expect from her, "If Jamie's shooting, Euan could load for him. He's fast."

Feeling a bit awkward now, but not wanting to admit it, I said cheerfully, "I'll volunteer him!"

Then we came to Brig O'Fearn, and I stopped talking so I could concentrate on driving carefully through the village again. But I had the hang of this now. The road to Glenmoredun Castle went haring away to the south, twisting around Pitbroomie Hill as though it couldn't decide which direction it wanted to go, but I followed it anyway, picking up speed.

"I don't believe you know where you're going," Ellen said.

"Oh, pish, there isn't any other road! How could I possibly get lost here?" (It is true I am hopeless at directions. I came down the wrong side of the mountain on that skiing holiday and had to be brought back to the chalet by a policeman. But the Pitbroomie moor was familiar. Part of it used to belong to Strathfearn.)

We were between stone walls and hedges on the way up, thorn and bramble, and couldn't see where we were in relation to anything else. Then there were no more walls. The thorn turned to gorse, still brilliant here and there with yellow blossoms and heavy with bees.

The pavement disappeared suddenly and we were on gravel *just* as the gradient increased dramatically. I had to slow down, but I forgot to shift out of high gear and, horror, three-quarters of the way up, the Magnette stalled with a tremendous lurch.

Ellen made a little shrieking sound like *Eep!*

I tried to start the motor again and found myself in neutral, slowly bumping backward down the steep hillside and gathering speed. I yanked on the hand brake, and both of us nearly went flying out of the open car like a pair of jack-in-the-boxes.

"*God pity us.*"

I could hardly blame Ellen for that.

We paused quietly in the middle of the track, catching our breath in safe and sudden stillness.

After a few moments I said, "Well, we can't stay here."

"I might get out," Ellen whispered, "before you go anywhere else."

"You get out, then. I'll reverse back down to the pavement and turn around in the field gate."

"You can't reverse!"

"I'm *good* at reversing."

I couldn't get the damned thing started, though, because of the slope, which made me keep stalling. Eventually I had the brilliant and simple idea of freewheeling backward—very, very slowly—down to where the road widened. Ellen knelt up on the passenger seat while I did this, gripping the back of it with both hands, and bawling directions at me

like a banshee:

“Stop, stop! There’s a bend and a CLIFF—almost a cliff—*STOP!* Oh, sweet heaven. Thank you. Turn, yes, just go slowly here...aye, you’re around. Straight back a ways—go—go—*STOP!*”

I slammed on the brakes for the thousandth time. Ellen was doubled over laughing, out of mirth or hysterics I was not sure. “What?” I demanded. “Another cliff?”

“There was a—” She was gasping with hilarity. “In the way! It was a —”

On edge with the nerve-racking task of trying to back my mother’s car down a road about as wide as a bed and as steep as a staircase, where I wasn’t supposed to be, I found Ellen’s hilarity contagious.

“A rockslide? A horse and cart? Another car?” I craned my neck, trying to see as far as she could, tall Ellen riding up on the seat back like a figurehead in reverse. “Oh, help, not the bus coming?”

“You just missed it!” She was doubled over with laughter.

“The *bus*? I missed the bus?”

“A *grouse*, not the bloomin’ bus! There was a grouse ran under the car. Straight between the wheels and out the other side!”

“That’s lucky, then.”

It took us a while to manage the journey back down to the field gate, but we did manage it eventually without hitting anything, not even one of the suicidal moor birds. I was able to turn around and park, with the Magonette squeezed onto the grass verge so that it was pointing in the right direction (back downhill).

I had definitely overstretched myself, though I dared not admit it to either Ellen or Mummy. Feeling a bit limp with relief, I pulled on the hand brake and climbed up on the seat back next to Ellen. “Golly, what a beautiful day,” I said appreciatively. “You can see all the way to Dundee from here!”

The Tay spread between us and the Sidlaw Hills, away from Perth out to the North Sea like a widening train of blue silk. Turnips and tatties, berries and flax grew green below us.

“What a lot of ships going into Perth Harbor!” I said. “And look, you can’t see the Big House because of the wood, but there’s Aberfearn Castle at the river’s edge.”

“Euan and myself used to romp all over inside it when we were wee,” Ellen said.

“So did we! Playing at kings and queens! Did you climb up inside the chimneys?”

“Aye!”

We laughed in amazement at this improbable shared memory.

“What a shame we weren’t ever there at the same time,” I said. “We could have had proper battles.”

We turned around. Behind us, the hillside climbed away, clad in

health almost ready to burst into purple bloom, hiding young grouse. "This moor used to be my granddad's," I said.

"Aye, we used to work it for him," Ellen said.

"He sold the family jewelry so he could go to America for treatment, and he sold the moor to keep the house going. The land joins onto the Laird of Moredun's, so now Moredun's got one big grouse moor. He and Granddad always used to manage their shoots together anyway."

"Nice the land won't change," Ellen said quietly.

I turned to look at her. She was gazing across the fields and woodland of the Tay valley, her face expressionless, her eyes hot.

"Sometimes it makes me feel like I own it all, when I see it like this," I said. "Mine by right of me being here."

"I ken." She glanced at me sideways. "By right of keeping the willows and knowing where the Bronze Age boat is hidden in the burn. By right of climbing up inside the chimneys of Aberfearn Castle!" She turned her head fully. "You don't own any more of it than I do, do you?"

"Not one twig of willow. Not one pearl."

Even as I said it, I remembered the pearl I'd stolen from my grandfather's empty envelope. "Not a single thing in Strathfearn belongs to me." Not one forgotten pearl... "Not even the kilt I'm wearing!" I finished, and we both laughed again.

"I used to think Granddad was as rich as the King," I said. "But that was just me being little and ignorant. There were never bank vaults full of gold sovereigns and silver ingots. There wasn't a family fortune; there was never much *money*. There was only Strathfearn, only the estate and its land, cows and flax and berries, grouse and salmon and a few river pearls. And now it is gone, and so is he."

Ellen was silent—because what was there to answer to that?

"Sandy inherited the title by a complicated thing called 'special remainder,'" I added. "He's not the eldest, but he's my granddad's namesake and his most special grandchild, and our big brother, Davie, will get our father's title anyway. But even Sandy doesn't get a bean to go with it. Not that he cares about land. He's like an ostrich, head underground, digging up artifacts."

"He gets that from your granddad."

"We all do, a bit," I said. "Even you. Though I wouldn't want Sandy's job, stuck in a museum all day. I need complicated railroad journeys and people speaking to me in foreign languages to keep me happy. I want to see the world and write stories about everything I see."

"Will your folk let you do that?"

"I don't know. Nobody ever mentions that I'm almost old enough to be married; but I'll bet *other people* mention it to them. And maybe my people discuss it behind my back."

I realized I would be forced to run away from home if someone tried to arrange a marriage for me. I didn't want to think about it.

I pointed at the Sidlaw Hills across the valley. “See King’s Seat? Just in front of it is Dunsinane, where Macbeth lived. He’s supposed to be one of Granddad’s forebears.”

Ellen opened her mouth to speak. I beat her to the post.

“Don’t you *dare* call me Lady Macbeth.”

She laughed again. “I wasnae going to. I was going to say: we’re half the way up Pitbroomie Hill anyway, we may as well walk to the top. The motorcar’s all right here for a wee while, aye?”

So we got out and walked.

It was a steep hike—for the same reason that the Magnette hadn’t made it up the hill, we found ourselves so out of breath we were unable to talk (I was, at any rate). But it was lovely once the hillside began to level out. Able to breathe again, I sang:

*“Now the summer’s in its prime
Wi’ the flowers sweetly bloomin’
And the wild mountain thyme—”*

“—*All the moorland is perfumin’*,” Ellen joined in.

We finished the verse together, and sang the whole thing at the tops of our voices, scaring birds. We walked side by side on the track over the moor that was ours by right of our being there, singing to the sky and the wind.

I thought, just then and fleetingly, there wasn’t any place I’d rather be or any person I’d rather be with. If I could have chosen one moment of my life to go on forever, just then, it would have been that one.

We came over the summit of Pitbroomie Hill, and Ellen pointed toward the high mounds of East and West Lomond across the next valley. “Those are both Iron Age hill forts,” she said. “There’s a big one on this side, too, up the Knowes above Brig O’Fearn village. People have been here a long time. But now there’s nothing on top but birds and gorse and wind. Looking down on a glen like this always makes me think: Why did folk leave the hilltops?”

“When exactly is Iron Age?” I asked.

“Well, two thousand years ago, give or take an odd few hundred either end. Hard to tell unless you dig things up. That’s why your granddad’s work is so important: they line up all those different blades and compare them, and then they can work out the dates. Like geological layers, but not so old.”

Frank Dunbar had said the same thing about the Murray Hoard being important. He’d quoted Hugh Housman saying it, anyway.

“I think it’s easier dating rocks than arrowheads,” Ellen considered. “But maybe geology seems easier because I learned it in school, and I’ve kent the rest myself.”

"Did you really learn geology in school?" I asked. "How do you go to school when you're moving about?"

"We have to do a hundred days a year or they send Cruelty folk out after us—you ken, Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children. They'll take a bairn away from a family if your school attendance card isn't filled. We mostly go in the winter—we share a cottage by Aberfeldy with my cousins. I left high school last year. Euan left when he was fourteen, but I had a scholarship for science and history."

My heart stirred with a baffling jealousy. "Did you finish the course?"

"I didn't take the exams. They were arguing some rubbish about not being able to send the results to a proper address, but I don't believe that. Dad collects his Black Watch pension at the post office wherever he is. I know it was really three scaldy lads making a fuss at having to share work space with a lass, and a dirty tinker lass at that, and I left." She shrugged. "So no, I dinnae have a pass mark. But I still *know* what I learned."

We passed the upper drive to Glenmoredun Castle, with its ornate stone archway and gate lodge incongruously plumped all by itself in the middle of the moor. Below us, farther down in a fold of the hillside, nestled the turrets of the castle itself.

"Ready to turn back?" I asked. "If we go farther we'll just have to march back up again to get back to the car, like the Grand Old Duke of York."

Behind us, a pair of voices suddenly chimed: "Hey youse—*tinkies*!"

Ellen spun round at the catcalls. I turned more slowly.

"Tinkies, tinkies, carry bags, go to the well and wash your rags!"

"Got rags for us, tinks?"

It was two girls. Two working girls from Glenmoredun Castle, in service as housemaids or kitchen staff maybe, on their afternoon off. They'd come out to the gate lodge since we first passed it and were waiting for the bus.

Ellen was now one step ahead of me (and her steps were longer than mine). I could see the cords tightening in her wrists as she clenched her fists.

"Going down to Glenmoredun, aye?" asked one of the girls. She was round and rosy, with dark curls. "What are youse peddling? Needles? Wooden pegs?"

"Or reading tea leaves?" This with a self-conscious giggle from the other girl, whose brown hair was waved and fluffed. They both had on lipstick and little heeled sandals, and I reckoned they were younger than me—just done with school, working for the first time. The slim one with the crimped brown hair was somehow more self-assured, more worldly than her wholesome-looking friend.

"Tell my fortune!" was her next knowing suggestion.

Ellen missed a step, a flinch, as though she'd stubbed her toe. She

stopped, straightened her shoulders, and faced the pair across the narrow unmade road. I drew up short at her elbow.

The two other girls bent their heads together, black hair and brown, whispering and giggling. Then they looked up, and the cheeky, crimped-haired one called out, "What about your wee brother, would *he* tell my fortune?"

"I bet your wee brother would like to give me a kiss," squealed the rosy one daringly.

"*I'd* like to give your wee brother a kiss!" squealed her more experienced friend.

In unison they broke into a cascade of giddy mirth.

Now Ellen faced me again with her back to this brace of gleeful idiots, and she looked me up and down with an expression of vexed and bewildered astonishment.

They went on as if we couldn't hear them.

"Florrie, you'd kiss anything that *moves*. You'd kiss my old granddad—you'd kiss a *sheep*."

Florrie chastised her friend by batting her on the arm, and they both rocked with hilarity.

"Now that is how a well-bred young person speaks in polite company," I said to Ellen in a level voice, hoping my attempt at deadpan Traveller sarcasm would cool her down. "And aren't they optimistic about your brother!"

Ellen gave a jerk of her head in the direction of the two silly things, who were still chuckling like hens and staring at us with a kind of sideshow fascination, as if we were covered with tattoos.

"They mean you," she answered quietly. "Wi' your old kilt and bare legs. They think you're a boy." She reached out and fluffed my Joan-of-Arc hair with one quick, rough hand, as if I were Pinkie. Or, indeed, as if I were her younger brother. As my older brothers have been doing to Jamie almost all his life.

"Come on over here, laddie, Florrie is *gasping* for you!" called the rosy one with the dark hair.

"So I am, I'm all yours! Come over the road, wee man—"

I took a step forward, very deliberately, hands on my hips again, and with a wide grin that I couldn't quite control. I let the girls take a good long look at me. They stared and elbowed each other in the ribs.

"I wouldn't kiss an old woman like Florrie," I told them.

Ellen grabbed me by the back of my shirt. "Shaness, *Davie*, let them be."

I shook her off.

"You waiting for the bus to Perth?" I asked them.

The rosy one answered, "Aye, we're going to the pictures. We'll—"

More elbows and titters exchanged between them. The bolder friend finished for the other, "Brenda will take you along if you gie her a kiss!"

"Ooh, I willnae. I'm not paying a tinker's bus fare! It's you that's gasping for him—"

Ellen didn't try to stop me.

"Come on, then, Florrie," I said.

I crossed the road, still grinning like the Cheshire cat. Well, I'd practiced on Frank Dunbar, hadn't I? Florrie had a lot to learn from me about playing this game.

She tried to dodge me. Brenda, tipsy with laughter, held her by the shoulders so she couldn't escape. Florrie was a little bit taller than me, but not so tall I couldn't reach her mouth when I stood on tiptoe.

"You said you were gasping!" I accused, as she turned her face away.

"Go on, Florrie, he's bonny as the day."

Florrie turned back very quickly, and gave me a peck on the lips.

I didn't move. "Call that gasping?" I scoffed.

Bold now, challenging, she did it again, and then let her mouth hesitate over mine. For a second the tip of her tongue explored the space between my lips, intimate and secretive.

And this is so strange: it was *just as nice* as kissing Frank Dunbar.

But in a completely different way.

At this point the bus came rumbling over the hill.

"Oh!" Florrie cried, stepping back suddenly as if I'd stung her, and cracked me a bone-shaking wallop across the face with the flat of her hand.

"Cheeky devil," she said primly, as I bent over one knee with my face in my hands, seeing stars.

The bus pulled up in a cloud of dust, and Ellen vaulted across the road in front of it to pinion me, instinctively guessing I'd turn murderous the instant I recovered from the shock of being attacked. As I straightened up she grabbed my arms from behind and clamped them to my sides as if I were about to be shot from a cannon. That snake Florrie was escaping, hustled onto the bus by her still-tittering friend, Brenda. I fought Ellen in fury, quite ineffectively.

"Let me go!"

Ellen held me in a grip of iron. She murmured softly in my ear.

"Julie."

I stopped struggling, breathing hard.

"Whisht. Hush. Now, Julie."

The bus pulled away, and she let me go.

I stood staring after it, raging with impotent anger, one hand pressed to my burning cheek.

"This is how it always goes," Ellen said. "You have to playact. You have to bite your tongue and pretend you dinnae care. If you'd hit her back you'd have had the bus driver jump out and knock you silly. And if you ever tell my mammy or daddy I let you kiss another girl while I watched, I'll knock you silly myself."

She gave her characteristic snort of disgust, and added, "You should have let her gasp."

From somewhere in her skirt Ellen pulled her tobacco pouch, the exact shape and color of a river mussel, and her little clay pipe.

"Have a draw. Witless scaldies. Forget about them."

She got the pipe alight and handed it to me.

She'd smoked her pipe in front of me more than once before, but she'd never let me share it.

Something had changed between us. I wasn't sure what had made it happen. The car ride, the song on the moor? Or just me having to take a slap in the face as if I really were one of *her kind*?

Whatever it was, I thought, she had finally called me Julie and offered me a smoke. I thought it was probably worth it.

"Thank you," I said, feeling dragonlike, my face still burning with the sting of Florrie's slap, my mouth full of smoke.

"All right?" Ellen asked me.

"Nae bother," I answered, trying to be stoically Euan-like, and got a sardonic snorted laugh out of her.

We set off toward the car. I gave Ellen back her pipe. We didn't say anything else for a while, but as we came to the wonderful view of the Tay valley, Ellen observed in the neutral tone of a policeman making an accusation, "You just take anything you want when you want it, aye, Lady Julia? Just take and take. Born to it. You need a gift for my mam, so you pick your gran's roses. You want a motorcar, so you help yourself to your mother's. You were raging at those scaldy lassies, and you just thought you could slap them for fools."

I didn't answer. What was I supposed to answer? Because, uncomfortably, I thought Ellen was right. I thought of how I'd tried on Solange's pearls, and that kiss I helped myself to from Frank Dunbar, and the pearl in the envelope. Even the way I'd so blithely put my taxi fare to Strathfearn on my mother's account. And I'd very gladly taken Ellen away for the morning to have her to myself when I knew she and Jamie were...Well, I didn't know what they were. If anything. But I was childishly unwilling to share her.

Ellen swept her arm toward the river and forest and fields that lay at our feet. "You think this all belongs to you just because you're in it."

"So do you! You agreed!"

"I don't just *take* what I want. My folk don't steal things. We don't *keep* things."

"It's not the value of a thing that's important," I said, trying to defend myself. "I love the *story* of a thing. I love a thing for what it *means* a thousand times more than for what it's worth. You know the pearl bracelet in the Inverfearnie Library, the one that belonged to Mary Queen of Scots when she was a child? I don't give a *toss* what that's worth. But *Mary Queen of Scots' own bracelet*! And the Reliquary, what

about that? The price you paid for your willow bank, four hundred years ago? It's *hard* to have your happiness tangled up in things you can't keep."

"We don't mind about keeping things," Ellen said. "If you give a Traveller girl a ring, she'll wear it until some other girl admires it, then like as not she'll give it to her friend. For love. For the pleasure of giving. Because what's the point in just *having*? If I give a thing, I'll remember how happy we both were when I made the gift."

She handed me her pipe.

"Here, it's yours. Keep it. It's more blessed to give than to receive."

She never dropped her superior air of queenly command, but suddenly she was warm and fond, too.

I took it. I had to.

Then she smiled at me sunnily. "And aren't *you* happy, now I've given you something you wanted badly—something of mine?"

And I was. I really was.

She is wonderful.

9. The appearance of legs

After the marvelous excursion up Pitbroomie Hill with Ellen, the Big House felt empty without my family in it that afternoon, even though it was full of builders and painters. Feeling abandoned, I let my natural vanity take control of me, and I spent a long time in front of Mémère's dressing table mirror checking my face for damage (there wasn't any) and trying to make my hair look a bit more feminine (impossible). Finally I took a bath and got dressed in my own frock, the rose-colored Parisian georgette with the silver zigzags down the bodice that Jamie brought from Craig Castle, utterly useless for doing anything sensible in, BUT. But very much what I needed to make me feel myself again, cool and stylishly sophisticated. (Is that myself? I don't know if I *am*, but I like to *feel* that I am.)

And all the while my hands were occupied fussing with my face and my hair and my clothes, my mind was turning over and over again the multitude of disconnected events of the past month. My injured head. The naked man in the river. Mary's betrayal of Euan. The scholar's farewell slipped under the door. And pearls.

Scottish river pearls...there they were, like beads torn from a necklace: in Solange's jewelry box, seen through the lens of Hugh Housman's jug, lying on Jean and Ellen McEwen's palms, under glass beneath Mary Kinnaird's watchful eye in the Inverfearnie Library, hidden in a brown envelope on Francis Dunbar's desk, fixed forever in the floorboards of the tower room of Strathfearn House.

Pearls.

I thought there *must* be a way to string everything together. Only I couldn't see it yet.

It was frustrating. I didn't know what I was looking for. And the nighttime intruder...Mother seemed sure it had been a legitimate estate watch, but I wasn't convinced. I began another unproductive search, this time looking at the French doors of the morning room. I didn't have long till I was supposed to go and collect Euan to drive him back to Inchfort.

I was peering intently at the door handles, wishing I knew something about fingerprinting, when instinct caused me to straighten quickly. Someone was coming up the terrace stairs from the lawn with heavy footfalls. I turned around.

It was Francis Dunbar. I had about one second in which to straighten myself out before presenting myself as the presiding lady of the house: thank God I'd changed out of Sandy's moth-eaten kilt.

Frank Dunbar looked pale and grim. He did that same little leap

backward when he saw me as he'd done on the day we met.

"I'm so sorry, Miss Beaufort-Stuart—" He frowned, wondering if he'd got it right, and obviously decided that it didn't matter. "I'm so sorry. I'm looking for your mother. Or your grandmother, I suppose."

"They're in Edinburgh," I said. "Is it urgent? I'm about to go out myself." I didn't want to let Euan down. "I won't be long—I could come back in an hour or so. The others won't be back till about eight."

He hesitated, standing one step below the level of the terrace, as if he couldn't decide to come up or not. He swallowed, making a conscious effort to soften his expression. "I've had some bad news." He bit the single-syllable words off in the back of his throat as if each one was choking him and he could hardly get them out. He swallowed again.

"Oh." I did so like Frank Dunbar, and felt sorry for him. "Would I do, in place of my mother?"

I could see him swithering.

"I don't think..." he began.

Instead of trying to persuade him with words, I held up a formal arm for him to take.

I read him right: he couldn't refuse the polite, wordless request for physical support. I saw his face change when he made his decision.

We met halfway across the terrace. He took my arm, very politely, and escorted me through the French doors of his side of the double room and into his private office.

He offered me a chair, but didn't sit himself. It felt very like our first meeting, except he looked so beaten. He paced back to his open terrace doors and stood staring out over the hive of activity across the grounds.

"You've had bad news," I reminded him.

He turned around to face me, still not quite willing that I should be the one with whom he'd share whatever it was.

He winced, looking at me. It was something he thought I'd find unpleasant, something inappropriate for a young lady's sensibilities—

I guessed.

"Your men working along the river have found Hugh Housman?"

He blinked in surprise. He opened his mouth and shut it again, then nodded. "*My God*. You're a mind reader."

"You wanted to speak to my mother. We've all been looking for him for a month. People hardly ever just *vanish*. He was bound to turn up eventually, wasn't he?"

I didn't dare ask the obvious question: *Alive or dead?* Nothing in Dunbar's manner suggested the former, but I didn't want it to look like I *expected* the latter, even if I *did*.

I waited.

He didn't elaborate, so finally I found a neutral way to get him to go on.

"Where?"

He hesitated unhappily.

"Julie, this is so unpleasant. I don't know where to begin."

It was like being a tennis ball getting thwacked back and forth, swapping between being Davie Balfour and Lady Julia. I needed to let Frank know I wasn't made entirely of glass. I got up and crossed the room to stand beside him. "Is he dead?"

"Well—yes. Well—"

"Yes?" I prompted.

"Probably—"

I narrowed my eyes, overwhelmed with the feeling that all adults are incompetent lunatics.

"You found Dr. Housman and he's *probably* dead?" I said sharply.

"What on earth is that supposed to mean? Goodness, Mr. Dunbar."

He looked stricken. "I'm telling this very badly. I said it was unpleasant."

"Please sit down," I told him. "Just here. Have you anything to drink about? Whisky, excellent, just a moment and I'll pour you a wee drop." His housekeeping was chaotic, evidence of his lonely bachelor's existence—a decanter sharing a bookshelf with half a loaf of bread and cheese wrapped in brown paper. I found a glass and wiped it with a leaf off the blotting pad. "There you are. I'm not going to faint—" I pressed the glass into his hands and squeezed them lightly beneath my own. "Now, Frank, just tell me what happened."

"They found a body. They found—most of a body."

This time it was I who winced.

I instantly regretted it. He tried to jump up and the dark gold liquid spilled over his fingers. I pressed my lips together and held up a warning hand.

"What's missing?" I asked brazenly. Because truly, sickening though his news was, the man needed *shaking*. *One* of us was going to have to be brazen, or I'd *never* find out what had happened.

Frank Dunbar drew a sharp breath but managed to get the words out. "The head and shoulders are missing. And one arm." He drew another breath. "There aren't any hands or feet, either."

Very gently, I took the glass from him and set it on his desk.

"Go on," I said quietly.

"The poor devil—he's been...well, quartered by one of the dredgers somehow. Terribly mutilated. We think the spade of the digger caught him across the chest." Frank paused and looked up at me. I returned his gaze unflinchingly. He reached for my hand and held it tightly, clenching and unclenching his fingers as he continued speaking. "The water level's been a serious difficulty for us in digging the pipeline for the swimming pool. There's a tidal change of over a meter, twice a day, where the Fearn meets the Tay, and we can't dredge at low tide because the water isn't deep enough for the barge that holds the digger. But we haven't

been able to work at all because of the high flow that came with the rain. The body must have tumbled into the trench while the water was deep.”

“Goodness!” I exclaimed. “If the McEwens had been looking for pearls farther downstream they might have found him two weeks ago, when the water was so low because of the spring tide!”

“But if he hadn’t got trapped in the trench we might not have found him till the *next* spring tide, which isn’t till the end of July.”

“Oh—it’s perfectly morbid to think about.”

I said this because I felt that I ought to sound more sympathetic to the decapitated dead man on the riverbed. But I couldn’t think of anything other than how upset Solange was going to be, and it made me angry with poor Dr. Housman on her account.

“Did they find his clothes?” I asked.

Frank knocked back a gulp of whisky.

“No. But...the river’s been so high...they may have long washed away. The workmen trawled the ditch when they found his body, and that’s when they picked up his arm. And two beautiful bronze spear heads, of all things; they must have been buried in the peat. But not his clothes.” Frank emptied his glass. “I don’t understand why he took off his clothes if he was planning to drown himself....You’d think he’d have been trying to keep them dry so he could get dressed again.”

Regardless of that letter to Solange, which neither Frank nor I had seen (Mummy sent it off to the police before I could get hold of it—sometimes she is wise to me), I didn’t think Frank believed Housman drowned himself on purpose. I felt that he was focusing on the drink to cover up his doubt. Did he think someone *else* did it? That someone (Me? Solange?) pushed him in?

“What about the—the hands and feet?” I asked. “Did they *all* get cut off by the digger?”

“The doctor who’s going to examine him said they often detach after a body’s been in water a few weeks.” Frank sounded defeated. “The doctor’s not seen the damage yet, though.”

Ugh.

Frank didn’t voice any of his own doubts. Maybe I was imagining doubt in him, but I didn’t think so. Well, it wasn’t up to me—the Procurator Fiscal, who deals with accidental deaths, would decide whether there needed to be an inquiry. Fair enough Frank keeping quiet.

I didn’t have any idea how close Frank Dunbar and Hugh Housman might have been—it sounded as though they’d only just met this summer and shared a few meals. But I felt Frank needed a little compassion. I picked up his glass, added a dollop of water to it from the jug by the whisky decanter, and passed it back to him.

“Julie, you’re marvelous,” he said.

“I do try to be marvelous.”

He gazed at me as if it rested his eyes to do it, as if he were

appreciating the view from a mountaintop. I let him look. I stood still in the rose silk Vionnet dress, with my face turned away a little so I didn't seem to be self-aware. When I turned back to him he gave me the ghost of a smile.

"I said I was going to drive Euan McEwen over to Inchfort," I reminded him. "Is it all right if I go do that now?"

"Yes, of course. I—I'm sorry I told you any of this. I should have waited for your mother."

"I'm not sorry at all," I said with feeling.

Indeed, when I met poor Euan McEwen by the garages, I sent up a little private prayer of thanks that I already knew what was going on.

He was soaked and shaking. We looked each other up and down without speaking for a moment or two.

Euan broke the silence first. "That's a bonny frock."

My face flamed. My God—it was like being slapped again, and I don't even know why. As if I were mocking him on purpose with wealth and elegance and—and—yes, and my *beauty*. And he knew it. But I wasn't, *I wasn't*. I didn't mean to.

"Whisht." I drew a sharp breath. "I didn't realize the work was going to be so wet."

"I was shifting barrowloads of peat this morning," Euan said. "That wasnae so bad. But this afternoon—" He stopped abruptly.

"I ken," I told him in a low voice, so he knew he didn't have to explain to me about what the pipeline diggers had found in the trench that day.

"They asked me and the other lads who work the spades and barrows to hunt for the missing parts. They added fourpence the hour to our pay for doing it. But you had to get into the ditch." He paused, steadying himself. "I'd have done it for nothing....But I'm glad it wasnae me who found the arm."

He counts his working hours in *pennies*. I don't think I'd realized that. I felt so *stupid*.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

"Aye, nae bother."

I should have known I'd get "Aye, nae bother" for an answer.

"I really can't take you in Mother's car as wet as that," I said. "Let me get a mackintosh or something for you to sit on. There used to be car coats in the garage here—*buckets of blood*." There wasn't anything but paint cans and builders' ironmongery. Everything belonging to the Murrays had been cleared out.

"Never mind," Euan said. "I'll walk round by Brig O'Fearn."

"No, you will not walk. We'll find something in the house. They haven't finished painting, and the whole place is covered in sheets."

"No."

He spoke quite firmly, quiet as always, but with the determination of a soldier.

"I walked across Perthshire and Angus on my own feet when I was seven. It's summer, and I like walking. I'll take nothing from the Big House. I'll take nothing that belongs to the Glenfearn School, not even to borrow." He paused for breath.

"Why is that?" I asked sharply. "That foreman Robbie Munro doesn't trust you?"

"Not just him. All the lads on the site. I'd only been there an hour before I had to turn my pockets out and prove it wasnae me who'd lifted some gadgie's packet o' smokes he thinks he left in a digger overnight!"

"Huh," I said, narrowing my eyes. "I bet one of them is pinching cigarettes, or they wouldn't be trying to blame it on you."

"They likely would. They'd leave it on the train by accident and blame me."

"Well, I'm not letting you walk ten miles in those wet trousers."

"They'll dry."

Eventually I won, thanks to the moth-eaten kilt from the nursery bathroom, which we used to line the passenger seat.

"Did you see anything?" I asked. "Did you see any of it yourself—what they found?"

"Aye, but I'll not tell you about it."

And I didn't try to get it out of him. After that, Euan sat in absolute silence the whole way back to Inchfort Field. The morning in the sun with Ellen seemed a very long time ago.

I pulled up in front of the field gate. It is easier to turn around in the gravel drive in front of the library than in the narrow lane that runs past Inchfort on its way to Inverfearnie, but I didn't want to risk getting Euan in trouble with Mary again just by being in the car with me as I reversed, so I dropped him off first.

He started to get out.

"Euan—"

He waited, sitting next to me with the door open and one leg out of the car.

"Euan, now that they've found Dr. Housman and it's officially an accidental death, the Procurator Fiscal might decide there needs to be an inquiry. If there's blame to be found, I *know* they're going to try to blame you."

After a moment of absolute silence I heard him swallow.

"That day you found me—that last time anyone saw Dr. Housman alive?" I reminded him. "Remember what you did that day?"

Euan nodded.

"I'll swear you did nothing but help me," I said fiercely. "I'll swear you had nothing to do with whatever happened to Hugh Housman."

"I'll swear *you* did nothing but fall on your face at my feet," Euan said shakily.

We sat quietly for another moment.

"Meanwhile we just go on as usual," I said finally. "Shall I come for you tomorrow morning? I wouldn't blame you if you never went back."

"The work's worthwhile," Euan said. "And I've done *nothing wrong*. I'll be waiting for you."

The next morning, the kilt I'd left in Mummy's car in the garage overnight had disappeared.

A good many of the lads working on the building site were more ragged than any of the McEwens, and could probably use a well-made kilt, regardless of the moth holes. I was damned if I'd be the one to cast aspersions at anyone. I just knew that the second I said something had gone missing, someone would point a finger at Euan again.

Bloody hypocrites. It made me *furious* to think that the Glenfearn School builders were blaming Euan for stolen cigarettes. But in the uproar over Hugh Housman's mutilated body, disappearing kilts and cigarettes didn't attract the attention of anyone in authority.

Still, I'd miss that kilt. Father mentioned on the 'phone that my trunk had turned up at last, but *of course*, it was sent home to Craig Castle instead of to Strathfearn. Blast it.

10. *Lying about one's age can be a form of art*

Three days after my outing with Ellen I acquired a DRIVING LICENSE. Quite illegally, as I was not yet seventeen (or even sixteen for another month), and it was all down to Mummy. Inspector Milne's suspicious prying appeared to have awakened her inner Bolshevik, and so I discovered my own lady mother is not above quietly circumventing the law.

"I wouldn't do this for just anyone," she told me. "But Jean McEwen is a good woman, and we'll help her son in any way we can."

Mummy had the driving examiner from Perth meet us at the Brig O'Fearn Rail Station. Then she waited on the station platform with Lisette Romilly's latest novel (in French, of course) for half an hour while I took the examiner for a sedate tour of Brig O'Fearn village. I thought Mother was probably very happy to get a quiet half an hour alone with a book.

She knew I'd pass because she'd already tested me herself. Mother was very thorough. We spent the *entire day* on the road practicing on Sunday; we drove all the way home to Craig Castle and back, had a lovely lunch with Father, and—hurrah!—*collected my clothes*. Not my trunk, obviously, as it couldn't possibly go in the Magnette. But proper ordinary clothes that actually fit me. I had no excuse for being Davie Balfour anymore.

Driving for twelve hours in a single day, or whatever it was in total, is *shattering*. I slept most soundly the night before my examination.

Thus, *mirabile dictu*, I now had documentary proof that I was "seventeen"—apparently approaching my eighteenth birthday—in case Frank Dunbar ever had any serious doubts. I was grown-up and comfortable all in an instant, a proper young lady, appropriately dressed, at the wheel of a racing car.

Sandy came up on the train that night. Mummy let *me* collect him from the rail station when he arrived on Tuesday morning.

He looked straight over my head as he tried to hail a taxi.

"*Sandy!*" I cried.

Surprised, my big brother looked down and found me sitting not ten steps away from him at the wheel of our mother's motorcar.

"Julie! Great Scott! I didn't see you!"

"I'm not as insignificant as *that!*" I parried.

"I saw the car, but it wasn't Mother driving it, so I thought it couldn't be hers....Does she know you've taken it?"

"She certainly does," I said with pride. "She even fibbed to the

examiner himself when I got my license yesterday. For the ‘age’ box on the form she told him, ‘Julia will be seventeen in August.’”

Sandy burst out laughing. “That is not technically untrue.” He bent to kiss me on top of my head. Even up close I don’t think he noticed my hair at *all*. He hopped irreverently over the side of the car without opening the door, a habit all my brothers share, and rode balancing his worn leather valise on his knees.

I had hoped it would even up the sides in terms of youth and age to have another of my brothers about the place, but in truth Sandy might as well have stayed in London for all we saw of him after that. He stopped in to sleep (up in the former servants’ rooms in the attic with Jamie), but spent every waking second organizing the Murray Hoard at the Inverfearnie Library. He even took his meals there. I couldn’t tell if it was the collection itself or *Mary Kinnaird* that he was so enchanted by. Possibly both.

I had not yet made peace with her.

On the Wednesday after Sandy arrived, the fourth day of Euan’s ditch-digging work, Euan and I passed Mary on her bicycle on the Perth Road as I drove Euan the long way round from Inchfort Field to Strathfearn House. She had her head down, focused on the road ahead of her, and didn’t recognize me at the wheel of Mother’s car.

I didn’t recognize her, either; I mean, I didn’t *notice*. I wasn’t paying attention. But Euan noticed her right away.

“There’s the librarian getting her shopping in.”

“She always does that on a Wednesday morning. She’s early today.”

“Aye, we’ve seen her before. Dad and I passed her on the day we found you. We were in Brig O’Fearn that morning collecting tin.”

“You *were*?” I stared at him instead of ahead of me, thinking hard.

“*The road!*” he cried as the Magnette sashayed a bit.

“Fiddle, that was nothing.” I straightened up.

It was time to visit Mary.

I was done with being angry with her. Sulking wasn’t mending things for anyone. I needed her help, and I was going to get it.

I caught Mary in her study the next morning. Sandy was upstairs beaver-ing away at the Murray Hoard, and Mary’s face lit up unguardedly when she saw me, then fell again as she immediately remembered the disaster of our last meeting.

“I’m sorry, Mary,” I said simply.

“Oh, *darling!*” She leaped up from her desk to embrace me with fond arms. “Julia, I have been meaning to come see you—”

I saw that because I’d made the first move I was now playing a strong hand. By God: I was going to play it carefully.

“Sit down, sit down—” Mary fluttered. “I want to know how you’re

feeling—”

She made me wait in her red leather armchair while she bustled about with tea and shortbread. I felt disloyal, between knowing that Sandy’s there *all the time*, and my fury over what Mary did to the McEwens. I *knew* she hadn’t many friends. But I wouldn’t pretend I wasn’t friends with the McEwens as well.

I needn’t have worried. She was glowing. She wasn’t thinking about the McEwens, and she was scarcely aware of the sordid business which the *Perth Mercury* was now calling “the Strathfearn Suicide.” All she wanted to talk about was Sandy.

“He works so hard, it’s a pleasure to be able to help him,” she twittered. “And he’s so respectful of my own work. But the nicest thing for me is that it’s lovely to have company after supper. We’ve been reading to each other in the evenings, Burns’s poetry and Dickens—*Our Mutual Friend*. When Dr. Housman was here, I always felt I was on my own. Isn’t that strange? Yet I’m constantly aware of Sandy upstairs, even though I can’t hear him. I so enjoy having him here.”

She poured tea and sat down on the footstool beside me, clasping her hands around her knees. I’d never considered what a world of difference it must be for *Mary* to have swapped Dr. Housman for Sandy. I wondered if it had made her uneasy having Hugh Housman coming and going, right there near the rooms where she lived and undressed and slept all by herself.

“What was Dr. Housman like?” I asked.

“He was really very patronizing, you know, Julia. He was dismissive of my interest in the catalog and didn’t welcome suggestions. He made me feel a bit like a charwoman, there to bring him cups of tea and fresh pencils, rather than a trained librarian. It was the way he avoided looking at me when he spoke to me...”

“What did you—?”

She turned abruptly toward the window, so suddenly it made the gold pencil and the ear trumpet clatter together.

No, I’d better not ask that question yet. I could see she wasn’t ready for it.

Of course I knew why people avoided looking at *her*. But I realized suddenly that when she avoided looking at *you* it was like she was sticking her fingers in her ears, making it so that she didn’t have to know what you were going to say. Like Mémère, who has a trick of going foreign and feminine in situations requiring mental acumen, which shifts the difficult work onto other people.

I waited for Mary to turn back so she could see me speaking.

“It’s good having people about you, though,” I said. “The river watcher isn’t here all the time.”

Mary nodded in fervent agreement. “I don’t like the tinkers being here. Every year they make me uncomfortable, me here all alone and

them up at Inchfort piping and drinking into the wee hours.”

Ah, *hurrah*, I’d got her to bring up the McEwens *herself*.

“You know those Traveller folk at Inchfort Field are part of Strathfearn just as much as my grandfather was,” I said, still being cautious. “They own the willow beds at the mouth of the Fearn. They’ve been coming here for *hundreds* of years. Maybe longer than the library’s been here. My mother and Jean McEwen used to play together when they were wee.”

Mary looked away again. I reached across to pick up the trumpet and offer it to her so she could listen to me without having to look at me. After a moment she twitched it sharply out of my hand and I thought she was angry, but she held it to her ear and let me continue.

“Mary, the McEwens *love* this place. And Ellen McEwen is a great deal like you. She helped Granddad with the typology he made for his spear tips. You must have seen those drawings—Ellen did them herself! She knows so much about the estate and its past, the land and—and the way the land has its own story. She just didn’t get to learn it at university like you did.”

Mary lowered the ear trumpet and turned back to look at me once more. Her smooth face was still expressionless.

“It’s true not many young women are as lucky as I was about university,” she said. “But I shouldn’t think tinker folk care for that kind of study.”

I gazed down into my teacup. I held my breath for a moment. I couldn’t allow myself to get angry with her again. And truthfully, I didn’t like it that the McEwens muttered superstitiously to bless themselves and make Mary feel self-conscious and peculiar.

“You set an example for everybody, Mary,” I said. “I don’t know if *my* folk care for that kind of study, either—not for me. But I’m going to go to university. I *love* to read. I don’t want to run shooting parties all my life until my husband dies and makes me sell everything. I want to be like you.”

“Oh, Julia.”

Her eyes were brimming. I felt cheap and manipulative, because although I’d meant it—I’d meant it with all my heart!—I had been trying to hit her hard, and I could see that I’d succeeded.

Mary said, “Julia, mine is a very solitary existence.”

“All the more reason to let some more interesting people into it!” I added warmly, “You let Sandy in.”

Mary stood up. She went to her desk and fiddled with the inkwell, very deliberately dropping blobs onto her big desk blotting pad.

“It’s not been an easy summer for me, Julia,” she said.

And here was the other opening I’d been waiting for.

“All those police interviews! It must be dreadful for you. But they’re finished with you now, aren’t they?”

"I might have to act as a witness if there's an inquiry," she said unhappily. "I was the last to see Dr. Housman alive, other than you."

"What did you tell Inspector Milne about that day?" I asked.

She drew in a sharp breath.

"Oh, Julia, why do you want to know more about that unfortunate incident?"

I answered with a fair amount of honesty: "I just wish I knew what happened to *me*!"

She sighed. She sipped her tea. Finally she said cautiously, "I saw Dr. Housman come in that morning. I—I went out on my bicycle to shop in Brig O'Fearn village. The library is closed to the public on Wednesdays, but Dr. Housman had often been on his own there and I'd left the back door on the latch for him; that's how you got in."

"He left the back door standing open," I remembered.

"Yes," Mary agreed softly. "Anyone could have got in. There are all sorts of people about."

"Do you really believe any of the McEwens would come in here when the library was *closed*?" I asked. "Even if the back door was open? Without me and Jamie to encourage them? Have they ever before?"

She didn't say anything for a bit. At last, being as honest and straightforward as only Mary can be: "No," she admitted.

Now to finish my hand.

"Were they about the place?" I asked. "Did you see them at all that morning?"

She frowned. "I didn't see them here. But..."

I held my breath. I cocked my head a little, gazing out the window, feigning nonchalance. I didn't want her to know how much I cared about her answer to this question: how important it was for Euan McEwen that she answered as I hoped she was going to.

"I suppose I did see the McEwen lad that morning. In fact, he wasn't alone....He was with his father. I passed them twice, coming and going, in Brig O'Fearn village. They'd a cartload of scrap tin."

"You passed them *twice*!" I exclaimed, unable to suppress my excitement. This was more than I'd hoped for.

"Well, they were there the whole morning," Mary said with a small huff of irritation. "They were going door to door along the High Street, collecting tin."

"Door to door along the High Street!"

"It's what they *do*, Julia," Mary said patiently, as if she were instructing a small child. "Didn't you know?"

If they'd been going door to door through Brig O'Fearn, and Mary had passed them coming and going—they had a whole *village* full of witnesses to prove they hadn't been anywhere near the library or Hugh Housman that morning. Mary had arrived back at Inverfearnie *after* whatever had happened to Hugh Housman—and to me. If Euan and Alan McEwen had

been in the village all that time, they couldn't possibly have been involved. Even the police would have to agree.

"I do know, Mary," I agreed rather breathlessly, trying not to give away my elation. "Oh, I'm so glad we've had this talk!"

And I put down my teacup and saucer and got up so I could squeeze her warmly in my arms.

"I *hate* for us to be angry with each other. Please do agree with me that Euan and Ellen McEwen weren't trespassing before," I said. "I like them, and I'm friends with them. I can make sure Euan won't bother you here, if only you'll let him cross over to Strathfearn by the Inverfearnie footbridge."

Mary scowled.

"Really, Julia. You are very manipulative."

I laughed. She didn't have any idea to what extent I'd manipulated her.

"Well, perhaps so, but it's a little thing, Mary!" I confessed. "A little thing mended. I know you don't want to have to mix with the Travellers; but I'd so like you not to be afraid of them, either. I want *you* to feel at ease."

"Well." She sniffed. "Only for you, my dear. I will try to be brave!"

"You're the bravest person in the world," I swore.

It was some time after I left her, when I was once again alone along the river on my way back to Strathfearn, that it occurred to me I still didn't know how I'd ended up lying on the path near Inchfort Field where Euan had found me later.

When I got back to Strathfearn and started to cross the lawn up to the Big House, Frank Dunbar was pacing around the edge of the newly tiled swimming pool, sucking furiously at a cigarette and leaving behind him a trail of smoke like a steam engine. He was alone, and I was decently and girlishly attired in my own summery flower-print cotton dress; I couldn't resist a diversion in his direction.

"Hello," he said quietly.

"Hello! How are you?" I asked.

"As miserable as I know how to be," he answered honestly, but shrugging. "Cigarette?"

"Not out in the open, I won't. But thank you."

He blushed.

"I can never get it right."

"Frank by name, Frank by nature," I teased, which coaxed a smile out of him. "What are you doing?"

"Just a routine inspection. Once the pump room is finished we'll enclose the pool, but I'm afraid the pipeline out to the River Tay will be

delayed.”

I didn’t ask why. But I did ask, “Is there a night watchman on the estate?”

“There are several,” he said. “There have to be, with so many workmen staying in the stable apartments and servants’ quarters. There’s also a guard in the gate lodge who makes regular rounds, and the Water Bailiff sometimes checks the river path late in the night as well.”

“Does somebody check the doors of the Big House?”

“I expect so,” Frank responded vaguely. He took a drag on the cigarette, with that air of faint distraction which I found so inexplicably attractive. After a moment he added assertively, as if trying to excuse his initial lack of a definite answer, “Unless I draw up a schedule, they don’t always coordinate their shifts.” He sighed. “I’ve been scolded by the Procurator Fiscal for not having a better grip on the reins of this place.”

He took another pull on his cigarette, then bit his lip, looking away when he finally spoke.

“The doctor who examined Housman wasn’t able to determine the cause of his death—his body’s quite deteriorated. When we pulled the—pulled him out of the water we should have taken him straight to the mortuary that evening. But we waited till the next morning, and apparently this—um—dried him out and—*accelerated* decay. And because of where the poor fellow got cut, without a proper postmortem the examiner can’t actually tell if he drowned or—”

“Good gracious, or *what*?”

“Well, that was what I said,” Frank huffed. “Or anything else. He might have had a heart attack, or choked on a sweet. Or poisoned himself, if it really was suicide. But it’s not obvious that he drowned, and the doctor can’t issue a death certificate in case the Procurator Fiscal tells him to conduct a postmortem.”

“How it does drag on so horribly!”

“It does. At first I kept hoping they wouldn’t find *any* of him—that he was still alive. Now I keep hoping they’ll find *all* of him and lay the poor fellow to rest.” He laughed nervously and dragged at the cigarette again.

“I’m sorry,” he continued. “What a bloody awful thing to say. His sister’s had to come up on the train from somewhere in the Home Counties to identify him, and of course there isn’t anything that helps. Apparently she *did*, though—told the doctor, ‘Well, he always did have spindly legs, which is a poor excuse for not being able to swim’! She wouldn’t stay in Perth but one night. ‘Please do send him south so I can bury him.’ Damned unfeeling woman, if you ask me—though I suppose it’s hard on her having to wait for the Procurator Fiscal to make up his mind about an inquiry.”

That Francis Dunbar should feel intimate enough with me to share such obscenities and confidences was almost as intoxicating as sharing a cigarette, and we stood for a moment side by side with our hands not

quite touching, both of us gazing down over the birchwood in the direction of the river. The ruined tower of Aberfearn Castle just cleared the treetops, looking ominous against a drab gray sky.

“Hullo, there’s your foreman, Mr. Munro, hailing you,” I said.

The engineering manager was stumping up the path at a purposeful pace with a large canvas parcel under his arm. There was a wooden rod awkwardly sticking up out of it over Mr. Munro’s shoulder, so that he looked almost as if he were carrying a bagpipe, and I stifled a snort of laughter.

Shaness, Julie! God pity you!

Oh, heavens, it couldn’t be more pieces of Hugh Housman, could it? I decided it couldn’t possibly or Mr. Munro would have looked queasier. He didn’t look happy, though.

Frank Dunbar had gone white as a sheet.

“You’ve found something?” Dunbar asked shakily. “Not another damned Bronze Age spear point.”

“Not this time.” Mr. Munro nodded at me again. “Perhaps it’s not fit talk for the wee lassie.”

I deemed it best to say nothing. I took a step backward, affecting cool containment (when in reality I was *burning* with curiosity and already planning how to spy on them if they insisted on getting rid of me). I raised one hand in valedictory, as if requesting a dismissal.

“Please don’t go,” Frank said to me, and to Mr. Munro, “It’s all right. Miss Beaufort-Stuart is very sensible about this business.”

“What is it?” I prompted. “If it’s horrible I don’t want to see. But I want to know.”

“We’ve found the chap’s trousers,” said Mr. Munro, offering the folded bundle up to Frank.

“Found his *trousers*?” Frank repeated in what sounded like sheer baffled disbelief.

“Aye, all folded tidy down by the stone river gate to Aberfearn Castle. And his tangs and glass for pearl fishing. It doesnae look like suicide to me, though; it looks like he went for a swim and maybe got into difficulty with the tide. Why would you fold up your clothes like that if you were going to drown yourself?”

“*The bloody idiot!*” Frank burst out incredulously, and he backed away from the pathetic bundle Mr. Munro was holding out to him.

I suddenly put my finger on what it was Frank kept refusing to accept: *any of it*. He was completely incapable of getting it into his head that Housman was actually dead. Every piece of proof hit him as though he were hearing the news for the first time.

“Let’s see, shall we?” I offered, and took the parcel from the foreman with firm hands. I put the canvas down at our feet and unfurled it carefully.

Beneath the bulky glass-bottomed jug and the pronged stick for pearl

fishing, Housman's tweed plus fours were still folded neatly, but after nearly a month of sitting out on the riverbank they looked as though they'd just come out of a very muddy tubload of washing without being rinsed. I didn't want to touch them. Frank, the moment he clapped eyes on them, swooped down to check the pockets. Mr. Munro crouched along with us to get a better view.

Frank gingerly produced ten shillings in change, a sodden box of matches, a chewed-looking fountain pen, and a silver card case which he pried open with shaking fingers. It contained not any calling cards, but a reader's ticket to the British Library with Hugh Housman's name on it, smeared but still perfectly legible.

"The bloody *idiot*," Frank Dunbar repeated softly. "The bloody, blithering *idiot*." He dropped the case back onto the muddy, sodden cloth. I stood up because I was tired of crouching and I didn't want to get my knees wet with kneeling. Frank stayed hunched over Housman's abandoned things, shaking his head in outraged disbelief, while the foreman grimaced at the grubby collection.

"Well, there's nae doubt that's your man," said Mr. Munro, and Frank glanced up at him angrily. He didn't say anything, just raised his eyebrows and looked back down.

"No, it doesn't really look like suicide," he said at last, finally agreeing with Munro's prosaic deduction. "But—"

He didn't say it, but I knew he was thinking about the letter to Solange. One of these jigsaw pieces really did not fit properly. I stood with my hands on my hips, gazing down at the disarray we'd made of this potential evidence, considering that Frank was already in trouble over the poor horrid man's body not being treated with any kind of respect, either.

"Hadn't we best take better care of this stuff?" I suggested. "Won't the police want to look at it too?"

That made Frank back away as if he was sorry he'd touched any of it.

"Is this all you found?" I said. "No shirt, no tie, no shoes, no socks, no jacket?"

"Perhaps the rest of it is with the rest of *him*," Munro suggested morbidly.

Frank began to wrap the canvas folds closed again, more carefully this time.

I thought that he and Munro were both right: it was a most bizarre and haphazard way to prepare to drown yourself. It rather looked to me as though Dr. Housman had been fishing for a peace offering for Solange, in haste and passion. He'd given her pearls before. Maybe what Frank said the other day was right, and Housman had taken his clothes off to keep them dry, planning to put them back on.

The two men were still on their knees by the canvas bundle, but they were both looking up at me. I suddenly felt very vulnerable. What if they

asked me to describe the scene for them? After all, it was *me* who'd seen Housman in the nude, but *oh, mercy*, I couldn't imagine telling Mr. Munro—still less Frank Dunbar—about *that*. There were limits to my impudence. After all, I was certifiably *intact*.

I *wished* that did not make me feel so dirty every time I thought about it. The reality of having been *examined* was somehow much nastier, in my head, than the assault that didn't happen and which I couldn't really imagine. Almost as if people were trying to blame me for what wasn't done. As if my body were rude and lewd just because it was a girl's body.

At any rate the uncomfortable feeling with Dunbar and Munro was something I couldn't quite put my finger on—but it had to do with being very attracted to one of them and having to hide it while we pawed over the dead man's clothes like the witches in *Macbeth*.

"I should go," I said. "I'll tell my mother what you've found."

"Tell her I'll meet her in my office whenever it's convenient," Frank Dunbar agreed, and I fled up the ruined lawn and into the savaged house.

11. How a lad gives a kiss when he means it

Mémère insisted on coming with me to her seamstress in Perth. It was astonishing, and a lesson in dignity, how my grandmother managed to soldier on as though nothing were out of the ordinary in a house full of builders and the poisoned atmosphere of Hugh Housman's suicide. I came away from the excursion to the dressmaker's feeling that every critical thing Ellen McEwen had said about me was true. Even the blue silk I'd wanted for my party frock was too expensive, and I was sorry now I'd asked for it.

Mémère and I were both fingering it in rapt admiration when she muttered wistfully to herself, "I could if I had to," and I *knew* then that she could not afford it. Mummy took me aside very delicately and whispered in my ear, "*Let her choose something she can pay for.*" And I felt rotten.

Mémère picked out a leaf-green chiffon with a gold sheen to it when it caught the light. It really was beautiful, but I was afraid it would make me look like a fairy—I could just imagine Jamie and Sandy: "Happy birthday, Tinker Bell!"

And then—my goodness, I'd never thought about that name being insulting. But it was. *She is quite a common fairy....She is called Tinker Bell because she mends the pots and kettles.* How much I did take everything for granted, even the storybooks I thought were so harmless.

Euan could have walked home the next evening, but I liked the excuse to take the car out, and I gave him a ride anyway. Euan laughed at me as I started to guide the Magnette up the drive.

"What?" I demanded.

"I like the way you start the car."

"How's that?"

"You always look as if you think it's going to fight you. Your eyes go wee and narrow, and you hunch your shoulders and lean in as if you're going to give it what for."

"I do not *hunch*," I told him with dignity. "I have to sit right up on the edge of the seat so I can see out."

I became terribly self-conscious then. Because when I was starting the car, I was only thinking about the *car*. I was not thinking about my hair or ghosts or some stupid dead man's trousers. And *that* was when Euan was watching. What could I possibly look like when I was just being me?

"I'd no' want you to look at me like that," Euan said.

"I would *never*," I vowed. "I say, have the Perthshire and Kinross-shire Constabulary come out to visit you at Inchfort since they made their last find? Because Mother rang them and told them to go door to door through Brig O'Fearn asking folk if they saw you on the morning Dr. Housman disappeared. And almost everybody did."

"Aye! That Inspector Milne, the wee man with the wee beard? He talked to everyone digging on the pipeline this noontime, him and the Water Bailiff."

"I hope he didn't make another fuss over you in particular."

"Aye, nae bother. And we're all away the morrow, so it's finished. There's new tatties we help with every year out Comrie way, and it's time we were out of this mire for a bit. When the inquiry's over we'll maybe come back."

My heart fell. I hadn't expected them to leave the second they found they were cleared of suspicion.

I could understand getting itchy staying in one place. But I didn't really *understand* the McEwens.

"They found Dr. Housman's trousers yesterday," I told Euan. "Perhaps there won't be an inquiry."

"Perhaps pigs might fly," he said with resignation, then offered suddenly: "Come in about and have a sup of tea with us. If we don't see you for another fortnight Ellen will miss you."

And I could not resist even if there'd been reason to. I thought that the uncertainty of Ellen in my life must be a bit what it was like for Mémère in the months and weeks leading to Granddad's death. Eventually, you know, you are going to have to go without. But until then...

When we got to Inchfort, Euan hopped out over the side of the car (like my brothers) and opened the gate so I could pull safely into the field next to the wagons and horses and, that evening, also the van belonging to the Camerons—the McEwens' motorized cousins who were going to help whisk them all away to the headwaters of the River Fearn or wherever it was they were going.

It really was only a sup of tea to start with. Ellen was away out with her mother doing one last round of the houses in Brig O'Fearn village, selling their willow baskets and heather pot scrubbers and horn spoons, so I waited. Old Auntie Bessie started frying up a mess of skirlie—oatmeal and onions together—which honestly smelled so good I started pestering her to show me how to make it (thinking we could easily do it on the portable gas ring in the morning room). The kiddies were shy with me, and Euan slipped away with them to the bottom of the field to organize a game of rounders in which I didn't quite dare join.

When Ellen and Jean McEwen got back they were carrying a great sack of new potatoes between them; Ellen dumped them off and hooked my arm through hers to drag me away up the lane to Boatman's Well,

taking with us a few big tin cans for water. Pinkie came prancing at our heels (she would desert Euan in favor of me any day of the week).

"You're away tomorrow," I accused Ellen. "And I thought things would be all right here for you now."

"Och, at it again!" she warned. "Fixing and managing everything. The world's supposed to stop just where you want it, aye?"

"No, of course not," I answered in irritation. "I meant I'd miss you. I'm not being selfish—"

She gave her little snort of scorn.

"Not *only* being selfish, at any rate! I'm trying to say something *nice* to you."

We reached the well, but Ellen kept on walking.

"Where are you going?"

"The telephone by the Bridge Farm post office. Call your mammy and tell her you're stopping for tea with us. I've pennies for the telephone—we sold all those baskets."

We dropped the empty water cans outside, with Pinkie standing guard over them, and jammed ourselves into the old white concrete 'phone box so that Ellen could listen in on what I said and be in charge of making the call. Of all people who could have picked up, I got Frank Dunbar on the other end, which flustered me. Ellen had her ear pressed against the other side of the receiver, ready to eavesdrop.

"Who's that?" she whispered.

I elbowed her in the ribs to shut her up. And made the error of saying aloud breezily, "Oh, hello, Frank."

Ellen leaned back against the glass-and-concrete frame of the telephone box, smirking, fanning herself mockingly with one hand. She mouthed at me, *FRANK!*

Bloody flipping hell, I thought, and there wasn't anything I could do to take it back that I'd called him such a familiar name, or cover it up.

"Julie?" he said. "Where are you?"

I tried frantically to beat Ellen away from the receiver and almost instantly gave up because it was too hard to maintain dignity in the tone of my voice while I was engaged in a brawl with Ellen in such close quarters.

"I'm just up the road at the post office," I said evenly, taking deep breaths. "I wanted Mother to know I've been invited out to supper—"

Ellen mouthed mockingly, *Invited out to supper—oooooh!*

I paused, *forcing* myself to sound measured and cool. "Is my brother about? I mean Jamie, not Sandy. I'd like to talk to Jamie."

"I'll get him, but Julie, I'm so pleased I've got you on the 'phone. I just spoke to the Procurator Fiscal. He'd like to avoid a fatal-accident inquiry in court, and there won't be any further precognition. He told me he doesn't want to know any more about the habits of travelling tinkers when it's clear the unfortunate fellow couldn't swim. He was very short-

tempered about it. But he's uncomfortable telling the doctor to issue a death certificate without the rest of the remains, so we're to go on searching for another two weeks and then he'll review the situation."

Ellen was grimacing hideously at everything he said, and at this point it was necessary to stuff another penny into the telephone, giving a sense of false urgency to my call. When he came back on the line Frank added hastily, "I'll just get your brother."

Ellen gave me a little space—not much—for the simple task of telling Jamie to let Mother know I was coming home late. When Ellen heard me insisting that the car was in a safe place she got annoyed with the waste of her pennies and snatched the receiver out of my hand. "You come, too!" she ordered Jamie. "Then you can be sure *Lady Julia* gets home safely."

"Tell him to bring me a sweater!"

I heard Jamie's far-off voice say, "Pardon? Speak up!"

"Milady wants a wrap." Ellen spoke through her nose, giving her best impression of landed gentry. "The mink or the ermine will do—"

"Oh, *stow it*, Ellen McEwen!"

We wrestled for control of the receiver again. Jamie was laughing down the line on the other end. "Which sweater?" I heard him ask, and the warning pips clicked on to let us know our last penny was about to run out. I was beset with a host of afterthoughts. "Bring coffee! Bring roses for Mrs. McEwen! Bring *Sandy*!" I cried just before the line went dead.

A mournful dirge on the pipes came skirling up the lane as we sloshed back toward Inchfort Field, laden with the cans of water from Boatman's Well.

"That's Euan," Ellen said grimly. "Let's see if we can change his tune."

It wasn't a nice evening. The air was close and damp, with low clouds hanging sullenly overhead, as if they wanted to burst and had been told not to. We'd only been back a minute or so before Jamie and Sandy came lurching out of the mist down by the Salmon Stane, Sandy carrying what was obviously a workman's paraffin lamp from the estate in one hand and an armful of red roses in the other. All the kiddies came pelting up for the safety of the tents, and everyone else froze in suspicion because they couldn't tell who it was at first.

Then another thought occurred to me: I suddenly worried it might be awkward to have so many Beaufort-Stuarts from the Big House descending on the McEwens' camp. I tried to swoop in to the rescue.

"My brothers. Ellen, you know Jamie—this is Sandy."

"Sandy Beaufort-Stuart," Sandy introduced himself, distributing his burdens and shaking hands all round. "Thought you might appreciate this last offering from the Earl of Strathfearn—" And he produced from

inside his tweed jacket not only a packet of French coffee but also a dusty bottle of Granddad's favorite single malt, aged well beyond the thirty-six years the label boasted. Ellen suddenly remembered a thing I'd told her about Sandy.

"That's you, aye?" she said. "The Earl of Strathfearn."

Sandy looked surprised, then laughed. "Why, yes! I suppose it is. But the drink is thanks to the late earl."

Sandy went round pouring a dram for anyone who had a cup, chatting amiably.

"Aye, I'm cataloging the Murray Collection now—I understand there's quite a few fine pieces contributed by yourself, Mr. McEwen? No, I don't get a penny to call my own, nor any of the land, but if I'm lucky they'll elect me as a representative peer for Scotland someday, and I'll get a vote in the House of Lords! Imagine being able to shake things up down in London—what new legislation is troubling you at the moment?"

There was a little bit of an uproar as everyone started to offer opinions at once. Later, laughter, and Sandy drinking with Alan McEwen and the Cameron men, and Aunt Bessie scolding Euan for his mournful piping. The roses, which the McEwens would never be able to take with them when they left, got divided up by the little girls who stuck them in their hair and behind their ears. The skirlie got served up along with oatcakes and sweet new boiled potatoes and a great slab of butter that Jamie had liberated from the icebox at the Big House. In the blue-white gloom of the misty North Sea haar, one of the Camerons joined in with Euan on a fiddle, and there was a woman I didn't recognize playing an accordion, and Sandy and Jamie and Ellen and I ended up in a foursome reel, skipping and skidding over the damp grass.

"See, you didnae need your mink after all," Ellen said in between tunes as I abandoned my sweater. "This'll keep you warm." And the fiddle and pipes launched into "Strip the Willow." It was so damp and misty that you couldn't even see the Salmon Stane at the bottom of the field, but I wasn't chilly at all.

I think my most constant dance partner was Alan McEwen! Gallantly polite and formal: he reminded me of *Granddad*. Euan was stuck on the pipes. I'd have danced with Euan McEwen. I don't suppose he'd have been brave enough to dance with *me*. He hadn't Ellen's bold streak, and there were plenty of friends and cousins to fill in the gaps, though not so many of our own age set.

Contrary to whatever those stupid small-minded women in the hospital thought, the McEwens and their folk are all incredibly modest. Skirts down, legs together, blouses done up properly. The older women were watching me closely; I noticed. I was worried the eccentric clothes I had been turning up in all summer might have caused them to peg me as dangerously wanton.

In a moment when we'd stopped for a swallow of lemonade and to

catch our breath, I said again to Ellen, "I really am going to miss you. It will be very dull when you are gone."

She sang to me teasingly from Robert Burns's "Red, Red Rose":

*"And fare thee well, my only love!
And fare thee well awhile!
And I will come again, my love,
tho' it were ten thousand mile!"*

We had a good big fire going by the time it got dark, past ten o'clock still, despite the cloud. The music just didn't stop, and we kept on dancing till we were falling over each other (and the excited Pinkie, who thought she knew how to dance), because we really couldn't see anymore. Someone took me by the arm and bent to murmur in my ear. It was Sandy.

"I'm going back to the Big House," he said. "I'll stop at the library and let Mary know there's no harm doing here. She doesn't like a ceilidh much, and it's half eleven. Jamie said he'd like to stay a while later. But if you want to go now—"

"I don't want to go *ever*."

Afterward I asked Jamie if he noticed anything between Mary and Sandy, and he told me not to be ridiculous.

"What's ridiculous about it?"

"Sandy doesn't notice women."

I felt my eyebrows leap up into what was left of my hair. Jamie laughed.

"I mean, he doesn't notice *anybody*. He's thirty years old, and I don't believe he's cast a glance of appreciation at anything under five hundred years of age since he left school. He's celibate as a monk. Probably more so."

It was true; Sandy hadn't even seen *me* when I picked him up at the station.

And yet...part of me thinks maybe that's why he hasn't noticed what Mary looks like, and why they can get along so well—the way he gets along with the McEwens and their folk—because he just doesn't *see* people.

In the end, Jamie and I didn't go back to the Big House at all that night.

We stretched the cover over the car in case it rained, and then Jamie and Euan and Ellen and I all sallied back up the lane through the dark and the haar to the post office telephone box. The silly thing is, it was nearly as far as it would have been to walk back to Strathfearn House—but this way we didn't have to negotiate the river path, or worse, the swinging iron footbridge in the dark. You know what mostly I didn't

want to have to do—pass close by those flipping standing stones! I seemed to be more afraid of ghosts during the last summer at Strathfearn than I usually was.

Mother was remarkably levelheaded on the 'phone.

"Jamie and I are going to stop at Inchfort overnight," I told her.

"Thank you for ringing, Julia. Your grandmother was worried about you driving all that way around so late at night."

"Oh dear, she's not still awake?"

"Very much so, but she has used it as an excuse to listen to the whole of *Lucia di Lammermoor* on the wireless, and it's not yet finished. Sandy warned us you might stay. Try to be polite—it's most kind of Jean McEwen."

"Och, nae bother," said Mrs. McEwen, sounding like Euan, when I passed on Mother's gratitude. "Your mammy, Esmé, was always in about the camps here when she was a girl. Just like her dad."

You see...you *do* lose track of people. Because the McEwens were here every summer since our mothers were children, and so were we, but our mothers played together and we did not. Somehow Jean and Esmé went their separate ways, and their paths swung so far apart that their grown children only just learned each other's names. How long does it take? How do you ever hold on to anybody?

"Where's your gran going to live when you've packed up at the Big House?" Ellen asked me as we made up the extra beds.

"Well, with us, of course. She's coming to Craig Castle. I won't be there, though; I have to go back to school."

"Will you go back there when you finish school?"

"I think I'll go to Oxford. It'll be like an extension of school. I like it."

"I thought only men went to university."

"Lots of women go. Mary went! You could go!"

"Why would I want to?"

"You could study archaeology."

"Huh." She sounded skeptical. "Would *your* folk let *you* do that?"

"I keep *telling* them I'm going to university. Two of my brothers have already gone, and no one ever objects when I say I'm going, too.

Sometimes you just have to do what you want, even if they say no."

She laughed. "There you go again, taking the reins of the world."

"Isn't it just taking the reins of *myself*?"

The bow tent was set up so that there was a bit of living space in the middle and a sleeping space at either end. Ellen and I and some of the younger cousins were at one end, and the older McEwens were in the other end with the baby. The lads went out to a different tent. There wasn't quite enough bedding with me and Jamie unexpectedly there as well; I had to share with Ellen, and Jamie had to make do with a ground sheet.

Auntie Bessie and the woman with the accordion were still cracking

away by the fire out front as I crawled into the coziest, most wonderful camp nest I'd ever imagined, on a mattress stuffed with straw and heather and well-protected from the wet ground by troughs dug round the edges of the canvas for drainage.

I really was tired, but my mind wouldn't turn off. I was so delighted by the snugness of the camp.

"Is this where I stayed when you brought me here after I got that dunt on the head?" I asked, staring up into the dark, aware of Ellen warm and wide-awake on one side of me, and her three little cousins already snoring gently on the mattress made up next to us.

"Well, a bit. We've been and gone to Blairgowrie since then, so the camp's come down and been put back up on other greens since. And we were farther across the field before, but it's muddy there now."

After another time of quiet, listening to the little girls' trio of purring snores and sleeping sighs, I decided I was the only one still awake in our end of the tent, and I jumped when Ellen whispered suddenly at my ear, "I like your brother."

"Which one?" I whispered back, to provoke her, as I knew perfectly well which one she meant.

She gave her characteristic snort. "The one who's not old enough to be me dad! Young Jamie. He talks to me like...like I'm one of his mates. I never met a lad who does that."

"They all do that. All my brothers do, I mean. I'm the only girl they've ever had to talk to, and the youngest, so they just treat me like another one of them."

"You're lucky."

I considered.

"I suppose I am. But it's like being raised by wolves—you don't realize you're not one yourself until someone points it out to you. Sometimes it makes me so mad that not everyone treats me just like another wolf."

"Those lassies did, up on Pitbroomie Hill."

"When you said 'I like your brother' just then, you sounded exactly like those lassies. I thought you meant you wanted Jamie to kiss you."

She laughed softly. "I wouldnae mind."

We lay very quietly for a minute or two, listening to everybody around us being quiet. Then Ellen pulled the covers up over our heads so we were in a little cocoon of privacy. She lay very still. I was just about to free my own nose to avoid suffocating when she whispered in my ear, so softly it was hardly more than her lips moving and carefully shaping words as though she were talking to Mary Kinnaird—as if she'd do that!

"What was it like?"

"What was what?"

All I could hear of her answer was a click and a hiss.

"I can't hear you," I whispered back. "What?"

"On Pitbroomie Hill. *That kiss.*"

"Oh, that."

I put one finger against her lower jaw and tilted her head toward me. And then I pressed my lips against hers, just softly, and kissed.

"Like that."

She snickered silently, the ghost of her scornful snort. Then she cranked her whisper up a notch, so I could hear her.

"You never. That's all? And you fooled her, just with that?"

"Why not?"

"That's not how a lad gives a kiss. Not when he means it."

I am not entirely sure what possessed me, and that is the honest truth. It was part—yes it was—part curiosity, but partly anger at her *constantly* being so patronizing, and also I wanted to call her bluff, to throw her challenge back at her. But...well, and it was excitement. I wanted to *know*.

"Go on, then," I said. "Since you know so much about it."

"*Hush*," she warned.

"*Go on.*"

Just as I'd done, she used the tip of her own index finger to turn my face back toward hers. Just delicately. And then she suddenly closed her mouth over mine, and

And there was strength in it, and hunger, and control, and it was like standing on the edge of a cliff in a gale, frightening but also marvelous.

Ellen backed off. She lay silent, waiting for my reaction.

I whispered at last:

"Golly."

She gave her derisive snort.

"Do you like it, when a lad does that?" I asked.

"Depends on the lad," she whispered. "It definitely depends on the lad."

I tried to imagine who I'd like to kiss me like that. My Swiss ski instructor seemed very amateurish all of a sudden. I wondered, feeling the blood rising to my cheeks, what Frank Dunbar thought of me for the prudish little kiss I'd given him last month. I tried to push him out of my head, but I couldn't.

Yes, I could imagine Frank Dunbar kissing me like that.

I wasn't sure I'd *like* it. But I couldn't stop myself *imagining* it. I'd have to try it to find out whether I liked it or not.

I shivered.

I could feel Ellen laughing even though I couldn't hear her.

"Scared?" she whispered.

"Not of you," I answered. And then, to prove it, I kissed her back.

When I absolutely had to come up for air or pass out I stopped.

We lay breathless and shaking with suppressed and nervous laughter, both of us suddenly quite overcome with hilarity.

“You said you’ve never!” she hissed.

“I haven’t!”

“Then how—?”

“You showed me!”

“Copycat.”

We both shook with mirth again.

At which point we’d become careless about the noise we were making, and Ellen’s mother suddenly told us from across the darkness, soft and sharp, “Whisht, Nellie, hush up and go to sleep. You are keeping Lady Julia awake.”

“Lady Julia is keeping me awake,” Ellen complained loudly, and I thought I would *die* trying to smother myself and not burst out laughing.

She grabbed my hand and squeezed it.

And that was enough to shut me up, can you believe it? Being her conspirator like that—lying together in the dark, holding hands, not needing to talk, not needing to do anything else. Just *knowing*.

Nothing else happened. But we were still holding hands when I fell asleep.

12. Enough to pay for a 'phone call

I was awake and restless less than five hours later, and Ellen chivied me out into an exquisite pearly dawn of gleaming sun-tipped haar mist, gray at the foot of the field and rising to luminous pink overhead. It was burning off fast but still piled like cotton wool in the riverbeds. Jamie and Euan were already awake, and everyone else was stirring, too, packing up to move on.

Jean McEwen was red in the face. She and Alan weren't arguing, but holding a heated discussion in undertones: she angry, he trying to calm her down.

"I thought the police were *finished* with us!" I heard her say. "Old clothes strewn halfway down the field—they've no business searching our things without asking! And to do it while we're asleep—what cheek!"

"It might not be the hornies. Maybe one of those scaldy workers from the Big House. Maybe just a fox—"

"A fox looking for rags! Aye, that's likely."

I'd been nonchalantly folding blankets, but Alan McEwen saw me, all ears, and switched into cant. Mrs. McEwen shook her head.

"The Strathfearn lad and lassie ken what you're saying."

"Take the horses down to drink," Alan McEwen ordered us. Or ordered his children, at any rate, knowing that Jamie and I would follow along.

Ellen and Euan shrugged off the mysterious nighttime searching of the rag collection with the same stoic sufferance I'd seen in them so many times before when they met with injustice: in the hospital, in the confrontations with Angus Henderson and with Florrie, in being denied high school exams. I tried to imagine Ellen's lifetime spent enduring such an endless string of insults and violations. You'd have to have such certainty in your own self. You'd have to be *so strong*.

"Are you stopping for breakfast?" Ellen said as we negotiated the narrow path, leading the horses and ponies down to drink. "Or do you get poached kippers on silver platters up at the Big House?"

"Only ever bread and jam," Jamie answered. "The old women are all French."

"And we don't use the kitchen," I added. "We make coffee on a portable gas ring in our gran's sitting room."

"Your coffee's better than ours."

"Also because of us being French," I let her know. Suddenly, impossibly, I was happy: instantly, blithely, fleetingly happy. Happy for the wonderful ceilidh, for the strange and beautiful morning, for the

Prosecutor Fiscal's crabbit dismissal of the police inspector's precognition, for Mary's unexpected defense of Euan.

"So you'll stay here and drink it with us?" Ellen said. "You'll take anything, won't you! Pennies for the telephone. Your own gifts given."

I shot her a look, but if she'd intended any kind of double entendre, she didn't show any sign of it. Yet she'd managed to turn her own breakfast invitation into a challenge. *Everything* she said to me was a challenge.

We stood in the chill mist at the water's edge down by the little beach where I'd been hit on the head over a month ago. The Drookit Stane was a ghostly gray shape in the middle of the burn; it seemed to shift as the mist thinned around it, as if it were hopping from foot to foot to keep warm. You could see where the story about the stones walking to meet each other came from. I said, "You can get a penny for a jam jar, aye?" I started to take off my shoes.

Euan knew right away what I was up to. "You wee galoot. You're no' diving for rubbish."

"Your dad said there was all kinds of scrap in the burn here. I want to pay you back for the telephone."

"Let her fish about," Ellen said. "It'll be a better show than a day at the pictures."

But her natural prudishness took over when I started to unbutton my dress in front of our brothers. "*Shaness!* You wee midden! Stop that!"

Euan dodged behind one of the horses so he didn't have to look. They were both honestly and genuinely shocked.

Jamie intervened. "You crazy little idiot," he scolded. "Keep your clothes on. I'll fetch your jam jars."

I think he just likes an excuse to go swimming.

He took off his shoes and stripped efficiently down to his underwear—why is it all right for BOYS but not for GIRLS to do this? He waded out into the stream, and I thought how many times we'd all been paddling just at this place in summers gone by. The mist made it magical. You still couldn't see much of the opposite bank, but it was clearing around the Drookit Stane now.

"I could do with one of those glass-bottomed pearl fisher's jugs," Jamie complained over his shoulder. He was over his knees in the water already. "I can't see anything but rocks. Wait a minute—"

The burn got deeper around the Drookit Stane, and with one false step and a splash Jamie was suddenly up to his waist.

"Oomph! COLD!" he cried. "All right, I see now how Housman might..."

He trailed off.

"God pity us," Euan whispered superstitiously, because we all guessed what Jamie had been going to say and hadn't said.

"*Do you see any jam jars?*" I reminded him determinedly.

“There are mussels.” Jamie stood balancing himself with one hand against the Drookit Stane, bent a little at the waist and peering into the swirling clear brown water.

Wraiths of mist crept around him. I shivered, and Ellen hooked her elbow through mine. Euan said, “Come out the burn.”

“I didn’t know these were here!” Jamie said. “Rows and rows of them around the base of the stone! They’re as big as bricks!”

“Aye, Daddy won’t touch them. Stone-grown, he calls ’em. Leave them be.”

“Actually there is a jar! It’s wedged in a sort of nook—right at the foot of the stone.”

Jamie suddenly plunged into the burn like the heron spearing a fish, and came up a few seconds later spluttering and triumphant, holding aloft a large stoneware Keiller marmalade pot. The lid was sealed with an elastic band around cotton wool gone green with algae.

My mouth dropped open.



It was my jam jar. It was the one I’d drawn so idly, a month ago, alongside Housman’s broken glasses. It was the jam jar whose lid I couldn’t get right.

I felt quite detached from myself, watching as Jamie came sloshing back to the bank. He held the prize out to me.

I just stared. For a moment I couldn’t make myself touch it.

And then I was angry, furious to think I’d *never* know what had happened to me that day, and the anger swept over me like the heat of a bonfire. It made me able to move and act and rise to the outrageous challenge of taking that dripping mysterious thing between my hands without them shaking. I said through clenched teeth, “This had better be worth a penny.”

“It wasn’t you who had to get all wet for it,” Jamie remarked.

Jamie sloshed back into the water, his hands on his hips, peering about in case there were more. Euan still hid between the drinking animals, holding their leads, one hand resting on a pony’s back. Pinkie was sniffing about after foxes or badgers along the overgrown path.

All Ellen’s attention was on me and the jam jar. She said, “Och, that’s a big one. That’s worth twopence.”

I was like Pandora. I was mesmerized by the sealed Keiller jar in my hands, and the terrifying but irresistible compulsion to unseal it and find out what was inside.

I crossed the tiny beach to the flat rock where I'd fallen asleep guddling for trout, the day I was hurt. I sat down on the rock, gripping the jar between my knees, and picked the elastic band away from the lid. The disgustingly perished slime of cotton wool came away with the elastic. I lifted the lid. There was another damp layer of cotton lining the top of the jar. I peeled it back.

"Oh."

The horses were forgotten. In a moment Ellen was sitting tight against me, and Euan was crowding over my shoulder. Jamie came splashing up out of the water to see.

"Hold Pinkie. Hold her back," Ellen commanded, and Jamie knelt on the bank with his arms full of fox-scented golden fluff so Pinkie couldn't get in our way.

The jar was full of pearls.

"Oh—" Euan breathed close to my ear, echoing me. "Oh, the *beauties*."

Ellen said, "Jamie, give us your shirt—"

He tossed it to her in a ball. She spread the pale blue cotton over the flat rock, and I tipped the jar carefully out onto the soft cloth.

The pearls made a sound like rain falling in the river, pattering against one another as they slipped into the pale light of the damp morning.

They were gray and pink and salmon and buttery cream. A very few of them were as white as white, like Christmas-cake icing. The biggest ones were a sort of dusty silky gray and exactly the same; there were three dozen of those at least. Ellen picked one up and rubbed it against her nose, then held it out on her palm. Polished that little bit, just from the natural softness of her skin, the gray pearl seemed to take on a rosy sheen. It glowed like a little planet in Ellen's open hand.

"No one's sold them," she said quietly. "Here they are."

"I *said* there were pearls in the Murray Hoard," I cried in triumph. "I *said* there were pearls in the Reliquary!"

"These need loving." Ellen was fierce. "Oil and cotton wool and rubbing. What a thing to do with pearls four hundred years old, chuck them back in the burn like that, all mashed together against that dirty crockery!"

Ellen and Euan were like a couple of jewelers. Unlike me and Jamie, they knew exactly what they were looking at. It made me feel ignorant to listen to them.

"These are from the upper River Fearn. Right up at the foot of the Trossachs. I ken Daddy showed me the like in MacGregor's last year, this same fawn yellow. But did you ever see any such a size!"

"And these Tay pearls, so close to white! And the big gray ones, all matched—how old can they be? There's never so many this big. It would take years to match this many."

“It would take a lifetime.”

They touched the pearls lovingly without picking them up, rolling them against the blue cloth of Jamie’s shirt beneath gentle fingertips, turning them over to see their whole shapes. Many of the pearls had tiny imperfections, a funny little bump on one end, a peculiar shape, uneven hues. But they were each individually *beautiful*. And there were *so many of them*.

It was like finding pirate treasure.

Of course after our first initial wonder and delight, it occurred to us that this was *actually treasure*.

“How much do you reckon they’re worth?” Jamie asked shrewdly.

Euan shrugged and faltered, “I dinnae ken. I truly dinnae ken. I’ve never seen so many.”

Ellen said, “It’s like trying to count the stars.”

“Oh come now, there’s only a couple hundred,” said Jamie. “Say five pound apiece?”

“You cannae say that,” Euan answered. “Because—”

Ellen held up one of the big gray ones, the size of a healthy pea. “See the hole through it? Some of these are *sets*. Likely off a necklace, or more than one. It makes them more valuable.”

She gave the gray pearl to me to look at.

“Thousands,” she said. “Thousands of pounds.”

“How in blazes did they get in that jam jar in the middle of the Fearn?” Jamie exclaimed.

I thought the answer to that was most obvious.

“Hugh Housman put them there.”

“Oh, now, *Julie*—!”

“I saw him do it,” I said.

I didn’t remember seeing him do it. But it was like a jigsaw in my head, and now I had all the pieces: Hugh Housman bending over in the middle of the river, the light off his glasses reflecting in the water, the jar I’d sketched, the missing pearls from Granddad’s cup, the last forgotten pearl hiding unnoticed in the empty envelope. Granddad must have shifted them out of the cup and perhaps into the envelope, probably just because it was convenient—nothing to do with the original letter it had held. Then he’d added a hundred others from somewhere else, maybe some he’d found himself, and they’d gone unremembered, unnumbered, without any recorded value, until Hugh Housman found them among the intellectually valuable antiquities of the Murray Hoard.

And Hugh Housman had taken them, unnoticed, and hidden them. Presumably he’d meant to come back for them, maybe at the end of the summer when his work was finished and the Murray Collection was long gone. Then he could have gone away and sold the pearls without anyone

knowing where they'd come from.

Only he'd never be able to come back for them now.

Those are pearls that were his eyes....

Euan suddenly snatched his hand back as though the pearls beneath his fingertips had burned him. He and I had the same thought at the exact same moment: dead man's hidden treasure, and stolen, too. This was far too close for comfort. It was stained.

"Put them all back," said Euan.

"Dinnae be daft," said his sister.

"I'll not touch them."

"They need loving," Ellen repeated. "They're—they're like the spear heads. Someone cared about them. They need proper looking after."

"Who's going to *buy* them?"

Ellen leaned back, sitting up on her heels. "Well, nae doubt MacGregor's in Perth would, for a start. Who's going to *sell* them, though? There's a question."

We'd all backed off a little.

"I suppose they ought to go to the police," Jamie said dubiously. He'd tentatively let go of Pinkie, who was sitting with pricked-up ears and watching with interest, completely baffled by our excitement over something that smelled not interesting in the least.

"Are you going to take 'em in?" I asked scornfully. "I'm not."

Because truly...why did the flipping *police* need to know? The pearls were unremarked in the Murray Estate by everyone but me.

"And they're *ours*," I said fiercely. "They're *all of ours*. The McEwens used them to buy the Strathfearn willow beds from the Murrays."

There was a little awkward silence. Of course they weren't *ours*.

"I expect they're part of the Murray Estate along with everything else that's having to be sold to clear the debt," Jamie said, puzzling over what to do with them. "If we took them to Mémère she'd have to turn them over for auction...."

I said hotly, "Bother the Murray Estate. They belong *here*. Like Mary Queen of Scots' bracelet. Let's hide them again. I mean, not put them back in the burn, but let's hide them like *proper* treasure. In Aberfearn Castle—"

"*Up the Laird's chimney*," said Euan.

"The tower room at the top!" Jamie agreed.

"In one of the dove holes," I finished triumphantly.

Ellen said, "I want to polish them first."

We were...My goodness, it was like being *enchanted*. We were bewitched.

"Come on, Euan, if we take the horses back up we can get the baby oil and come back quick—dinnae go anywhere, Julie!" Ellen jumped to her feet and whistled to the dog. Pinkie sat giving her mistress a very silly grin. As long as I was sitting on the rock by the burn Pinkie wasn't

leaving, except by force.

“Oh all *reet*, I’m coming back in a wee minute anyway—”

Euan was already away up the path to Inchfort with the horses. Ellen followed with the ponies, and Jamie and I waited.

After a moment I couldn’t resist playing with the pearls a little, beautiful miniature marbles, running my fingers over their silky surfaces.

“That must have looked like the perfect crime to him,” Jamie said softly, coming to join me on the rock.

“He couldn’t have sold them all at MacGregor’s. Can you imagine going in there with this lot? They’d want to know where they came from. They would have suspected something. I’ll bet the pearls Housman gave to Nanny were from here. He never found them himself. But I’ll bet he had those earrings set at MacGregor’s to see what they were worth.”

“Clever,” said Jamie. “And careful, too.”

I exclaimed suddenly, “What was that he said in his letter to Solange—all that guff about how he couldn’t give her any answers, no *measure of his worth*, only his *promise*? I’ll bet that wasn’t a suicide note at *all*! He was asking Solange to run away with him!”

Jamie’s mouth fell open.

“All that *rot* about returning to the river! He wasn’t exactly lying—he had to code it, in case she didn’t come with him and she showed it to Mother, or in case someone else found it. He didn’t want to tell her how he was going to get rich—but he wanted her to come along when he did! Only if she didn’t, it wasn’t going to stop him—that’s what he meant about the river’s gifts being more eternal than flesh—”

Jamie stared at me as if he’d never seen me before.

“*I think you’re right*.” He sounded as if he absolutely couldn’t believe I’d worked it out, but knew it made sense. “No wonder he was rude about Mémère managing the estate badly,” he breathed. “Imagine everyone but him overlooking something so valuable!”

“Well *I* didn’t,” I huffed. “I kept saying the pearls were missing.”

Jamie swore. “Poor Mémère.”

“And—oh—poor *Nanny*.”

“Let’s not tell her.”

It wasn’t long before the McEwens came back. The four of us sat in the steaming mist and polished and counted three hundred and twenty-seven pearls before we put them back in the jar, packed in clean cotton wadding. Then we all went up to Inchfort Field one last time, and Euan and Ellen went off away west with everybody else, waving wildly backward at us till we couldn’t see them anymore, and then I drove Jamie over to the Big House in Mother’s car. We hid our recovered stolen goods under my bed until we had a chance to take them to Aberfearn Castle.

I was tempted to fill the little wooden cup with the pearls again, but it would have been too dramatic. And also—there were too many. Where

did they all come from? But Mémère had never missed them, and for all the thousands of pounds they might have been worth, they would not bring Granddad back nor stop the inevitable conversion of Strathfearn House to the Glenfearn School. Nothing in the Murray Estate belonged to us anymore. What would Sandy have done with them if he'd found them? Labeled the jar with a number and noted it in the catalog? And they'd just have gone off to Sotheby's in London to be auctioned with the rest of the Murray Hoard.

Suddenly I felt rather sympathetic toward poor old Hugh Housman. He knew what he'd found. I might have tried to run off with those pearls, too, if I'd been him.

Part 3

WHAT HAPPENED

24 JULY—17 AUGUST 1938

13. *Several things I can't have*

I missed the McEwens tremendously.

All that weekend the lifeboats hunted for Hugh Housman up and down the Tay, although apparently the authorities didn't think he'd have moved much from where the original bits of him were found. Even the fact that his lower half was so far downstream from where I saw him (and so were his clothes) suggested that he'd wandered down there, alive, before he drowned.

It was amazing, and not very nice, either, how much the disappearance of Hugh Housman taught us about the science of drowning. I felt like we were all holding our breaths, hoping and dreading some more of him would turn up.

Hugh Housman was not in the pipeline trench. They checked and checked. They must have accidentally dug him out and tossed him aside when they were dredging. Frank Dunbar was finally given permission to lay the pipes and get on with it. The tennis courts were shaping up, too; the whole estate was beginning to look properly academic.

It was possible Hugh Housman's upper half was part of the new tennis courts now.

The night after the McEwens left we had another midnight visitor—Pinkie.

The silly, wonderful creature. She abandoned Ellen and even Euan in favor of *me*. I was convinced she was very protective, and had it in her doggy head that I was naturally fragile. Indeed, I believed Pinkie was a reliable witness to whatever really had happened to me—if only she could speak. I'd called her faithless, but I thought now that was very unjust. She was *relentlessly* loyal. Only she wanted to be with the person she felt had the greatest need at any given moment.

Here's how she announced her arrival at Strathfearn House: rattling the door handles of the morning room at two thirty in the morning, *just* below my window, nearly frightening me out of my skin once again. I was the only person to awaken at first, and reminded myself sternly: *Frank sends someone round to check the doors*. But then Pinkie started howling and woke up everyone else. So of course we had to let her in. Jamie and I took her with us on the Sunday to smuggle our stolen pearls into Aberfearn Castle.

We'd both been clever enough to wear trousers and leather shoes. The path that leads through the gate arch in the curtain wall was overgrown

with nettles and bramble all in flower. Granddad's groundsmen used to keep it mowed—I remembered coming here on a very elegant picnic with Mémère, which we ate on tartan blankets on the bare stone floor of the tiny sixteenth-century stone summerhouse overlooking the River Fearn. In my childhood memory we crossed a wide green swath of lawn, so truly velvet that I pulled off my sandals and ran barefoot on it—I could feel the cool, worn stone of the summer house steps beneath my feet when I thought about it.

But now Jamie and I had to trailblaze our way through a thicket that felt like the Briar Wood surrounding Sleeping Beauty's castle, except that all around us you could hear the roar of engines and the thump of diggers.

"Dunbar says they're going to fence this off from the school grounds," Jamie said. "If they can't keep the boys out of the castle they'll have to pull it down."

"I hate the *ruin* of things," I mourned. "I like that they're *fixing* things, making the house *useful*. I can see the good in it. But why the castle has to be fenced off and Inchfort Field made private...I just hate it."

"You sound like Ellen. She should run for Parliament."

"That's even less likely than Sandy being elected to the House of Lords."

"Don't," Jamie said. "You'll just end up cross."

Nettles didn't seem to bother Pinkie. She bounded ahead of us up a narrow trench through the undergrowth.

"See, someone's used this path this summer," Jamie said.

"But it's all springing back," I pointed out. "None of it's newly trodden. They probably came to take a look at it when they started dredging the pipeline for the swimming baths."

"You can get in through the eastern wall, too, though, through the river gate. They'll have to block that off as well if they want to keep the boys out."

"Wouldn't it be nice to have just one last summer picnic with Mémère here?" I said wistfully. "But she's too frail to march through these weeds."

"She could if she had to," Jamie said, and we both laughed.

The stout medieval wooden door that I remembered was gone. It was doubly weird to think that this forlorn place was no older than our own solid and beloved Craig Castle in Aberdeenshire. The wreck of Aberfearn Castle seemed to belong to another geological age.

We left Pinkie sniffing about in the kitchen cellars and tiptoed up the grand stone spiral stairs to the Great Hall. The place required silence. It was so—so gray and still within and so green without.

The floor of the Great Hall was covered with bat and pigeon droppings and moss, but still mostly solid. We negotiated the gaps and made it across to the Earl's Chamber, without needing to speak to each

other about where we'd go next, and I followed Jamie up the chimney. I could still do it. It was even *easier* than it was when I was little: all the handholds and footholds were there, but now I was taller and could use my body to brace myself between the chimney walls in places where I used to have to hold my own weight with just my fingers and toes. Jamie had more trouble than me, bumping about like a bear in a Heffalump trap, but I tried not to be smug about it because he was carrying the pearls in their big stoneware jar in a leather cartridge bag over his shoulder.

We emerged through the collapsed chimney wall in the wonderful little attic dovecote under the roof where the wood pigeons still roosted. *They* had not noticed that the place is in ruins. Only me and my brothers and Ellen and hers, and possibly our mothers when they were children, had been up here in the past two hundred years. The pigeons all went rushing out in a panic of disturbed wings as we crawled out onto the solid (and rather mucky) floor.

"You could hide something here forever and no one would know," Jamie said.

"Till the floor falls down, and then you'd never get it back."

"*Let it fall*," he said fiercely, and I knew he felt exactly the same way about it as I did.

Jamie climbed up on the windowsill so he could reach the lowest of the nesting holes of the dovecote, and we stowed the jar of pearls deep inside. Then he jumped down and we stayed a moment looking out over our lost demesne, field and river and wood and sky, through the mullioned window of what used to be a chamber below the dovecote. The floor between these rooms was gone, so it was high and narrow, a bit like a chimney itself, lit by the windows at our level and the round holes in the wall above for the pigeons to use as doors. The endless hum of building works seemed distant, like the hum of grasshoppers. They were working even on Sunday to make up their lost time.

We could hear Pinkie barking her head off somewhere far below us, so we climbed back down.

She was gamboling in the kitchen and cellars, scrambling from room to room and carrying on like a demented thing.

"What's got into you, you ridiculous dog?"

She leaped to greet me, but turned immediately and galloped into the kitchen. That was the biggest of the below-ground rooms, with barrel-vaulted windows and a fireplace the size of the ladies' waiting room at Brig O'Fearn Rail Station, with a baking oven built into it. Pinkie bolted straight to one of the corners of the fireplace, and after a bit of excited snuffling, came back to us producing a jute sack whose contents she had clearly been worrying for some time.

As far as we could tell from the remains, she'd eaten a Thing entirely wrapped in brown paper, possibly a loaf of bread, and another Thing that

had been very greasy. Neither me nor Jamie wanted to get near enough to try to discover whether the latter had been of a Meat or Dairy nature. The bag clunked when Pinkie dragged it about the stone floor, and when we managed—gingerly—to get it away from her and dump it out, we found that the last Thing inside it was another Keiller marmalade jar—a small one. It rolled across the floor as it fell out of the jute sack, and Jamie and I jumped back as if it were a firework about to go off in our faces.

Jamie prodded it with his toe.

“Bloody coward,” I said.

“Language!”

I grabbed the jar and uncapped it in one defiant movement. It was half-full of marmalade. We both burst out laughing.

“Someone’s been camping,” Jamie said.

In the darkest, backmost corner of the bread oven, which is a nice big flat ledge raised a good four feet above the damp stone floor, we found a bucket from the building site partly filled with water, a carefully folded mackintosh, and a car rug. It would be a *hard* place to sleep, but safe and dry. Not so safe as the secret room in the attic, of course.

“Maybe they’re still here,” I said. “There’s no mold in the marmalade.”

“Maybe it’s one of the workers from the school renovation. Anyone down from Highland Perthshire wouldn’t be able to go home easily. It’s never one of the McEwens’ folk—they’d make themselves more comfortable than this.”

“But the Glenfearn School provides lodging,” I pointed out. “There are lots of people staying on the estate.”

“They take it out of your pay, though.”

We put the mac and rug back. The plundered jute sack was harder to replace.

“Gluttonous dog,” Jamie remarked. “D’you think we should restock the cold provisions?”

“No,” I said forcefully, feeling mean. “I think this chap’s been nicking sandwiches and cigarettes from the other workmen all summer, and they’ve been blaming it on Euan.”

In the end good breeding overcame suspicion, and Jamie left a half-full packet of Craven “A” cigarettes and a matchbox on top of the depleted sack as an apology.

We didn’t once, either of us, mention aloud the pearls we’d just hid. It was hard not to imagine that the owner of this little stash might be listening somewhere nearby, and it was irritating to discover that Aberfearn Castle wasn’t quite as abandoned as it ought to be. But we both felt certain no one was going to climb up the chimney among the doves looking for pearls.

“Come on, let’s leave by the river gate,” said Jamie. “I want to see if

that path's been used recently."

It had. It had been used a lot more than the main path.

"Well, there are a lot of people working on the pipeline," said Jamie.

This was the first I'd been down to the end of the path all summer, and the mouth of the River Fearn where it meets the Tay was a busy hive of frantic activity.

Out in the Tay a Royal National Lifeboat was doggedly dragging for the rest of Hugh Housman. Along the pipeline trench they'd got supports and pumps working to keep the water out while they laid the pipes. The generators billowed clouds of coal smoke and made the most deafening racket I've ever heard; the men in the trenches nearest the noise were communicating with hand gestures, like mill girls. Pinkie sat down on the river path suddenly and refused to budge.

"Oh, lord. This *daft dog*," I yelled. "Jamie, help me move her on."

He was staring in the same direction as Pinkie, but with intelligence and comprehension that Pinkie had not had.

"What is it?"

Jamie narrowed his eyes like a rat's—Mother's intolerance-for-stupidity glare that we have all inherited. He stalked forward a few paces, then stopped and spun on his heels to face me. He yelled, "It's the log boat."

"What?"

He grabbed me by my arm and pulled me forward, pointing. "*The bloody idiots!*" he gasped through clenched teeth. "They dug up the log boat!"

"Granddad's boat? The Bronze Age boat Sandy wrote about?"

"Yes, that one, the one he got birched for poking about when he was a lad—"

"And Granddad left it buried in the peat so he wouldn't hurt it!"

"Because it's THREE THOUSAND YEARS OLD, yes, THAT LOG BOAT," Jamie cried.

It had been destroyed.

They'd chopped it out of the riverbank in pieces. They must have had no idea what it was—just an old wooden boat in the way of their work. Maybe they didn't even realize it was a boat (Sandy wrote that it had been carved out of a single log, from an oak tree the size of which hasn't existed on British soil since before the Romans).

When Jamie and I found the boat, the biggest chunks of it had been tossed up all anyhow on a pile in the brambles on the other side of the river path to get them out of the way of the pipeline. I don't know if I'd have recognized that dried-up heap of mud and mold as the River Fearn log boat on my own, but once Jamie identified it, I knew without a doubt that he was right.

I remembered something that Frank had said about Housman's legs—once they dried out they decayed faster. I made my way into the briars

and rubbed my fingertips over the topmost layer of millennia-old wood. It came away on my fingers like shoe polish, brown-black as the peat it had been buried in.

"The air's disintegrating it," I said. "It's damp now, but that's because it rained last night. It's been drying out."

I tried unwisely to shift the top piece of boat, and a chunk of it broke off in my hand. It was crumbly and brittle as fudge.

"Bother. *Bother!*"

"Don't touch it again!"

"I'm not going to!"

Jamie gave me his hand to help me back out of the brambles. I said angrily, "*Now* I feel violated."

"I know," he agreed. "It's—it's like someone's vandalized Granddad's grave." He looked around for Pinkie. "What the devil is the matter with that dog?"

Pinkie had flattened herself on the path again, cringing and making pathetic little whining sobs.

"*Whisht. All right, lass,*" Jamie said, long-suffering, and allowed Pinkie to bundle herself over his shoulder so he could carry her past the wreck of the Bronze Age boat. It made him look like he was wearing a lion's-maned hood, like the warriors in the pictures of the Abyssinian emperor's coronation.

"You are a hero," I told him.

"I wouldn't do it for any old dog. Only this one reminds me of you."

"I'm not afraid of *boats*."

"You are of ghosts."

"Ha-ha."

Jamie put Pinkie down again after thirty yards or so. We were all a bit bedraggled after the safari through the Aberfearn Castle jungle and climbing in chimneys and adventures with greasy Things in dungeons.

"What I'm really scared of now," I said ominously after a bit, "is Sandy."

With good reason, as it happens. I have never seen him so volcanic with rage. I never realized he *could* be.

It was all over the dailies the following day; in his outrage Sandy rashly rang both the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Scotsman*, but of course it was the *Perth Mercury* who got there first. They sent a lady photographer, Catriona Lennox, and I was distracted by her brisk skill and competence from the outrage of this "rape of a national treasure" (Sandy's *exact words* to the reporters—he has never reminded me *so much* of Granddad). I envied Miss Lennox, not for what she was doing, but because she was able to do it so well. A bit like my envy of Ellen's pipe-smoking! Incidentally she was the only one of the photographers who *didn't* try to

move about the pieces of the boat so she might get a more “boatlike” picture.

It was no longer very boatlike, poor thing.

And then my loyalties were torn to shreds, for Sandy and Frank Dunbar had a terrific row. Right in the reception hall of the Big House with half a dozen workmen and me and Jamie and Colette all gaping at them.

“You have no control whatsoever over this project!” Sandy raged at the harassed site manager. “You don’t know who’s working out there—you don’t know where they are or where they’re staying—when they disappear, you don’t think to follow up until they’ve been gone for a solid week—when you find—”

“I know what I *haven’t done!*” Dunbar interrupted in fury. “Do you think I *don’t know* what I’ve failed to do?”

They faced each other like boxers, shoulders squared and heaving as they fought to control their breathing. Sandy was a good deal shorter than Francis Dunbar. But Sandy was sturdier, they were about the same weight, and they must have been near each other in age, though the silver showed in Frank’s brown hair and not in Sandy’s strawberry blond.

“You’ve been here *one week*,” Dunbar accused Sandy. “You’ve been here *one single week*, sitting cozy and quiet on that island making lists and being served cups of tea by the librarian—”

This made Jamie and I both suddenly aware that Colette was manfully maintaining the burden of steaming china she’d been carrying through to Mémère. Jamie quietly took the tea tray from her.

“How can you have *any idea* of what I’ve had to cope with in the past month?” Frank cried. “What gives you any kind of authority to accuse me of negligence?”

With fearsome loyalty, and freed of the servitude of carrying the tea tray, Colette sallied into the battle. She said frostily, “He is the Earl of Strathfearn.”

It was a moment of extraordinary awkwardness.

Sandy held up one hand, flapping it back and forth in a deprecatory way as if to clear the air of his inheritance.

Dunbar recovered first.

“With all due respect to your hereditary title, Lord Strathfearn—” He paused, raised his chin with that direct and winning confidentiality, and added apologetically, “It is Lord Strathfearn, isn’t it? With all due respect—the house and grounds of this estate belong to neither one of us. But I have the burden of maintaining them in trust. I understand why you’d feel I’ve failed that trust, but how was I to know—how were any of us to know—?”

Sandy brandished at him his Exhibit A, last year’s *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, in speechless agony.

“It’s not exactly the *Perth Mercury*,” said Francis Dunbar. “I don’t get a

copy delivered to my door.”

I let out a choked and hysterical squeak of laughter.

All of us watching had withdrawn into sides. Jamie and Colette and I stood in a huddle behind Alexander Lawson Murray Wallace Beaufort-Stuart, Earl of Strathfearn; and the six painters and paperhangers stood uncomfortably lined up across from us behind Francis Dunbar, the project manager for the Glenfearn School renovation. It was like the Battle of the Clans on the North Inch in Perth, and I was Hal o’ the Wynd, not sure which side I was fighting for.

Everyone glared at me when I giggled.

And I caught Frank’s eye. He was silently imploring me to switch sides, to defend him.

I pitched my voice as low and level as it would go, trying to sound like Marlene Dietrich, and said slowly, “Wouldn’t the Glenfearn School itself want to save what’s there of the log boat if it can be saved? Can’t you ask the trustees if they’ll help? Perhaps let Sandy direct a few men from the site, and see if any of the boat can be salvaged?”

Sandy slammed the *Proceedings* flat on the table where the post gets left, a metaphoric gauntlet.

“Yes, I can do that,” Frank said gratefully. “I’ll ring tomorrow morning.”

Sandy didn’t move.

“I’ll ask if they’ll pay for any outside expertise you might need.”

Sandy didn’t say anything. He nodded, turned on his heel, and stalked back out the front door, which stood open as usual; we could see him heading for the river.

Heading, I felt sure, for Mary, who would understand, and who would never tell a soul if he wept over it.

“Come, Colette, Mémère will be waiting for this and it’s getting cold.” Jamie beckoned with his head, and Colette followed him away from the reception hall toward the morning room. The little audience of workmen slunk back to whatever it was they’d been doing, and—without expecting it—Frank and I were left on our own.

“Thank you,” he said softly. “It is my fault, I suppose....”

I took the three long steps that brought me next to him, snatched his hand in mine, and stood on tiptoe to kiss him on the chin—it was as high as I could reach.

“How can it possibly be your fault?”

He tilted his face carefully away from mine, but didn’t let go of my hand. *God*. I felt traitorously disloyal to my Murray bloodline. Dunbar’s palm was cold and dry. Mine, I thought, must feel like a quiet flame against his. Better not try to kiss him again.

After a moment he turned back to look down at me, his eyebrows lowered in a faint frown of baffled unhappiness, and said, “If nothing had happened—nothing at all, none of this—”

“Something would have.”

He changed course so fast it was dizzying.

“There’s a variety playing at the City Hall in Perth. The trustees gave me a pair of tickets—worrying now that I never stop working. I thought...”

He paused to let me fill in the blank. To let me *choose*.

Oh, glory, I was tempted. Because why not—why not? If I was a decent, ordinary girl working in a hat shop—if we’d been introduced at a dance or a shoot or a village hall concert—if we’d played golf at the same club—wouldn’t it have been perfectly all right for him to ask me out? It wouldn’t have to end in marriage, for goodness’ sake. I wouldn’t have *minded* going to a music hall variety show in Perth with Francis Dunbar.

But I knew I couldn’t. It wasn’t the age difference, or my being the daughter of an earl, or the fact that I hadn’t yet finished school, though Mother and Father might have pointed to any of those as reasons. It was more...the way the summer started. Solange’s sad affair shadowing everything. My virtue being in question behind my back. I had to walk the tightrope without drink.

I think he knew it, too.

At any rate I was damned if I’d give away my game by finishing his sentence. If he wanted to take me to a show he could jolly well ask me himself.

He sighed. He didn’t let go of my hand—I got the impression he’d forgotten it was there, or felt so comfortable holding it in his that it didn’t occur to him he shouldn’t really be doing it. He said, “I thought you and Jamie might like to go.”

“But they’re yours!”

“I’d like to give them to you,” he said quietly. “I owe you *something*.”

And remembering what Ellen had said about giving, I had to take them.

14. *Those are pearls that were his eyes*

Sandy press-ganged me and Jamie out to the riverbank with him at dawn the next morning, armed with trowels loaned us by Francis Dunbar, so we could try to salvage pieces of boat. Mother brought us breakfast—bread and jam and a flask of coffee—in a willow basket that I’m sure she bought from Jean McEwen.

The work was messy and dispiriting. Being the one with the smallest hands and the lightest touch, I was supposed to move the clammy slabs of decaying wood at Sandy’s direction; Jamie, with his draftsman’s eye, was required to draw pictures. But everything I touched seemed to crumble. Pinkie lurked some distance away panting and sulking on her belly, unwilling to come anywhere near this project.

By about nine o’clock the sun was high and a few reporters had turned up again, along with a small crowd of intrigued citizens from Perth and Brig O’Fearn village who’d seen last night’s papers. I spotted the photographer from the *Mercury* whom I’d admired, and waved her over.

“Can you take close photographs of these bits and pieces? Can you do a lot of them—not for publication but to record it before it falls apart?”

She looked surprised. “Do you really—?”

She glanced at Sandy, mud-streaked and carrying with him an air of weary gloom as though he’d already been on his feet for a solid day. “Show me what you need.”

There was also more than one terrifically annoying urchin who wanted very much to nick bits of archaeological treasure. I tried to keep a wary eye on the crowd. There was someone at the back trying awkwardly to get a bicycle past everyone else standing gawping on the river path; the bicycle had a wide basket attached to the front handlebars and a great tin washtub strapped over the rear wheel. Pinkie suddenly exploded in joy like a demonic buttery rocket and launched herself at the bicycle.

I mean, at the person in charge of the bicycle.

It was Ellen.

I recognized her myself a moment later. Jamie said I looked just as excited and silly as Pinkie as we leaped to greet her. Perhaps he was jealous that I got there first.

Ellen had to lower the laden bicycle into the undergrowth so she had her hands free to manage both me and the dog.

She’d only been gone three days, I realized later—it felt like I hadn’t seen her for a *month*.

"Pinkie, ye're tiresome. All right, Jamie? Julie—"

Her storm cloud-blue eyes danced.

"I had to come back for the dog," she said.

"You never," I accused. "You came back for the log boat!"

"Daddy might have mentioned it to me. He was in the pub in Comrie last night and heard the men talking. And I did want Pinkie back, so I borrowed my uncle's push-bike and came out here this morning."

"It's thirty miles!"

"It's mostly flat. Well, for Perthshire. Straight along the Fearn valley."

She got Pinkie subdued, left the bicycle where it lay, and we all worked our way past the bystanders back to Sandy.

I told him, "This is Ellen McEwen. She's the one who did the spear-tip drawings for Granddad two years ago, when his eyesight got so bad."

He pushed back his cap, rubbed at his muddy forehead, and gave Ellen the ghost of a smile. "So it is. Of course we were dancing at the weekend, weren't we, Ellen lass?"

How could it be possible that so little time had passed since the ceilidh at Inchfort Field? It felt like—

Sandy took advantage of Ellen's archaeological drawing experience and put her to work immediately. He gave her the sketching block and pencils that he'd assigned to Jamie, freeing up Jamie to help lift away the crumbling slabs of prehistoric oak. You wouldn't have thought it would be backbreaking work, but it was. Squatting and bending and lifting—the closer we got to the bottom of the woodpile the damper, and consequently the more intact, the slabs became.

We kept working. Catriona Lennox, the photographer, either felt that she was onto something or else was genuinely interested in the hopeless project, and she stuck with us stalwartly, changing films occasionally and asking Sandy lots of questions.

We'd have forgotten to stop to eat, except that Mother conspired with Mary Kinnaird to bring us sandwiches while the library was closed for the midday dinner break. And it was brave of Mary, too, knowing how many people were about—reporters and photographers and the pipeline workmen and the general summer holiday rabble, all of them staring—or trying not to stare—at her smooth, unfinished features and her shining ear trumpet and her fearful determination not to acknowledge anybody as she passed.

She pulled up short, then took a step backward when she saw Ellen sitting there drawing, perched on a shooting stick with a leather seat, straight-backed and glorious with her long coppery hair falling down her back like licks of flame. Sandy was leaning over her, murmuring something in her ear with one hand on her shoulder, stabbing the forefinger of his other hand with emphasis at the shapeless block of wood Jamie was holding.

I saw panic and hatred cross Mary's face. It wasn't intolerance this

time. It was pure green jealousy. Sandy was *hers*.

"Mary!" I called.

She was carrying a net bag of provisions in each hand. I took one from her and reminded her, "I told you about Ellen."

"Yes." The look in Mary's eyes was wintry.

"She only just arrived this morning. She came back to collect her dog. But we knew she'd done the other drawings, so—"

I spoke without speaking aloud, moving my lips so that only Mary could hear me with her eyes.

Sandy's in love with the Bronze Age log boat, and I think maybe with you, so please just be nice to Ellen, because she is my friend.

Mary stared at me. "You said—"

I nodded silently.

Then suddenly Mary pealed with laughter.

"Whisht, away wi' you, Julia, you were aye a wee sook!"

I took one of her bags. "You'll not be cross with her?"

"If Sandy's to work with her, I suppose I must as well," said Mary bravely.

It is possible there are some things you want *so badly* that you will change your life to make them happen.

It was at exactly that moment that Jamie prized up what looked like the last slab of the pile. Beneath it was mud.

"Sandy, I think they've buried a bit of it under this—"

He scraped away damp earth with a trowel, his touch light and delicate as a musician's. "Julie, give me a hand."

There was a catch in his voice that was excitement. I gave the net bag back to Mary and knelt down to join him. In five minutes we'd unearthed a smooth, flat plane of darkly polished oak that wasn't in the least bit damaged.

"Put it back!" Sandy cried. "Don't uncover any more—slap all the mud back on, keep it in the peat! No, wait, what's that? Careful, Jamie, lad, give her a bit of room—Julie, don't use your fingers."

I picked at the mud with the tip of a trowel. I was black with peat up to my elbows. ("Och, peat never hurt anyone.") Ellen was leaning over my shoulder now, sketching as fast as she could.

What we'd found was a bit like the stern end of a punt—the corner of a flat ledge with six inches of rope still attached to a loophole bored through the wood. We'd found six inches of *three-thousand-year-old rope*.

Sandy identified it. I uncovered it. Ellen drew it. Catriona Lennox photographed it, and Jamie covered it up again.

When we turned to Sandy, he was gray as a Tay pearl and sweating. (He is in love with that boat, tragically in love.)

"Leave it," he said. "Leave it. I'll ring the director of the National

Museum. My God.”

“Sandwiches,” Mary told him firmly, and he laughed.

“Oh, Mary!”

He stood up and kissed her on the mouth, in full view of everyone and as naturally as if she were already his wife. “Yes, thank you!”

After that we had to send Mary back to the library to telephone the Water Bailiff so he could come and chase away the crowd. He tried to chase Ellen away, too, no doubt because he knows how much Mary dislikes the McEwens; but of course we wouldn’t let him. Then when he spotted all the gear Ellen had with her, he made up some nonexistent rule about how only Alan McEwen is allowed to camp at Inchfort Field. Sandy coolly set him straight. Sandy’s blood was up, and he was in fine form. I think he was ready to take on anyone.

We went back the next day, and the next, as if we were criminals revisiting the scene of a robbery.

The expert from the National Museum of Antiquities came out on the train and we had to show him to the site. Of course when we got to the boat there wasn’t much to see. Neither Sandy nor the chap from the museum dared to uncover the wonderful thing (“stern of Bronze Age log boat with towline in situ”), but they talked and talked about it, planning how they’d uncover and preserve it and what the proposed schedule would be like and how they might get the Glenfearn School to cooperate with them, and Jamie and Ellen and I got bored.

We were kicking our heels along the mouth of the Fearn where it meets the Tay, and the tide was down. The workers from the pipeline had disappeared overnight. There was one steam digger still parked in the water meadow, but the rest had vanished, and we took this to mean that they’d finished their work.

“They’ve run that pipeline straight through the reed beds,” Jamie said. “I bet we could walk along the line they’ve cut and cross to your willow banks on the other side of the Tay. I’ve never seen the tide this low.”

“It’s a spring tide,” Ellen told him. “That’s why.”

Frank Dunbar had told me the same thing. He’d said that the river would be especially low at the end of July.

“Well, what are we waiting for?” I said.

So we set off along the course that the pipes for the new pool were going to take.

The silt and mud flats in the Tay just beyond the mouth of the Fearn were all exposed, like a distant sandbar, and the water of the Fearn lapped in shallow waves against it. There was a delightful little breeze keeping off the midges. There was no one about but us and the birds. This summer the ground had been dug up and replaced and pipes laid

down and supports put in and taken away, and Hugh Housman's body had got cut in half somehow during all the activity. But it was all smoothed over now: finished.

Jamie was critical.

"Stupid how they've done all the work underwater. If they'd just waited until today, or this week at any rate, it would have saved them a load of trouble."

"Well, remember that when you're in charge!"

We walked along the edge of the reed beds, which rose like a jungle of giant grass, with blue sky and scudding clouds overhead. Reed buntings flashed and chattered. On the other side of the Fearn, the willows made a low smear of whitish-green against the greener fields and the Lomond Hills rising behind them.

Between us and the willows lay a strange riverine landscape of round, humpy sandbars, mostly exposed, gleaming darkly in the sun like the backs of a shoal of wet seals. A heron stood motionless at the water's edge, intent on fish.

And the tide was still going out.

Among the smooth humps, sections of the riverbed had been disturbed by the digging of the pipeline; great chunks of it had been lifted out and dumped back in by the diggers and dredgers.

"We can't walk across that mud," I objected. "We'll sink!"

"Don't you do geography in whatever posh school they ship you off to?" Ellen said scornfully. (They bloody don't. We are made to take *elocution* lessons. The German language is the closest I can get to anything scientific.) "That's peat," Ellen told me. "It doesn't drift like sand or mud." She pointed to another mucky lump so we could see the difference. "That's mud."

Pinkie started to whine.

"*Shaness*, you daft dog," Ellen scolded. "What are you greeting for? It's just tree stumps."

She pointed again. The heron spread leisurely wings and flapped away from us, low over the drained riverbed, and disappeared among the reeds.

Before us, where Ellen was directing us, one of the islands of peat erupted in twisted, curving tentacles, like half-buried dead branches. The strange smooth coils were the same color as the uncovered river bottom. Another tangled eruption lay beyond the first, and then another. They seemed to be growing from the tidal flats, growing *through* them, the worn roots and stumps of a forest we'd never seen. They were the skeletons of trees.

But no trees as large as once these were could have grown and died and disappeared in any living person's memory. They were part of the Tay's thousands of years of ebb and flow and drought and flood.

Pinkie stopped whining, but slunk close about my legs, spooked.

“How old are they?” I asked. I had no doubt now that Ellen would know.

“The peat’s maybe three thousand years old. Or older...or not so old. Anything stuck *through* it like that is older than the peat—the peat got laid down over it. Like the boat. The peat *preserved* these stumps.”

“It’s *amazing*.”

“You’re saying those tree stumps are all *three thousand years old*?” Jamie asked incredulously.

“More or less,” she agreed. “But now they’re uncovered, the air and tide will eat them away. They need to be wet and covered up. Every time the tide goes out this far it’ll wear them down some more.”

Pinkie cowered, silently hugging my legs. Then she lay down beside me.

She knew. The stubborn, beautiful yellow dog suddenly refused to go forward another inch.

Flat on her belly on the wet silt, Pinkie was focused on the disturbed mud pile just to our right, on the side of us that was the River Fearn as we crossed its mouth. She simply wouldn’t budge, and eventually I went to give the offending pile of mud a kick.

It came to pieces beneath the toe of my tennis shoe and Ellen suddenly dragged me backward, away from it, holding me tightly from behind with her arms across my chest, and then Jamie clutched at one of my arms as well.

For a moment the three of us stood staring in appalled horror at what we’d found: the top half of Hugh Housman.

It wasn’t really a whole *half* of him. It was his head and neck and shoulder, and a bit of the other arm that hadn’t turned up before.

It was indescribably awful.

You wanted and wanted to look away, but for the longest time you just couldn’t. The only thing recognizable in the blackened, shredded face was the wire scrub brush of his whiskers. But the most truly horrific thing was the rope coiled close and tight around his neck.

Jamie whispered, “That wasn’t suicide. You can’t strangle yourself and then go jump in a river.”

We all glanced at each other at last, released.

“What do we do?” I whispered back. “The water will cover it up again, and there won’t be another spring tide for a month. It’ll fall apart. No one will be able to find it.”

“The water preserves it,” Jamie reminded me. “Remember how the doctor complained about them leaving his legs to dry out?”

“It’s like the log boat,” Ellen said. “We should cover it with mud again to protect it. And mark the spot so the lifeboats know where to look—”

The thing was so far from being human it didn’t actually seem *foul*—it

didn't make me feel sick, not like the time we took a dead deer to the abattoir to see how they cut up the venison. This was different—it felt horrific but faintly unreal, the way you sometimes feel in a nightmare when you think you're drowning or being buried alive. Your brain keeps insisting: THIS CAN'T BE REAL.

"I'll do the mud," I said through my teeth. Because I was very ready to hide it. "I'll put the mud back on."

"Ellen, have you a knife?" Jamie asked.

"Aye," she choked.

"Can you cross over to the willow bank and cut four or five withy wands? Stout and tall as you can get, and we can drive them into the riverbed here around it so they'll stand above the water when the tide comes in and the police will know where to look for it—"

"Aye."

"Julie, let me do that," Jamie said, but I wasn't going to be babied by him. We buried the corpse again together, trying to treat the hellish thing as if it were as fragile and exquisite as Sandy's boat.

Not one of us had the stomach to go and gape at the exhumation that followed.

Not so the rest of humanity. There had been no interest in an English antiquities scholar supposedly suffering an accidental drowning, and a *little* public interest in the discovery that part of our glorious Scottish past was under threat and might or might not be salvageable; but the press announcement that someone working on the Glenfearn School renovation had been garroted and shoved in the Tay to decompose brought the whole of Eastern Scotland out to gloat.

My brothers and I took refuge in the library from the ghoulish onlookers, and so did Ellen.

It was Sandy who threw together the opposing forces of Ellen and Mary. He wanted Ellen to make clean copies of the boat sketches she'd done earlier in the week, and poor Mary—so resentful, but of stalwart conscience—was too enamored of my big brother to do anything other than allow his gentle requests to be accommodated.

I met Ellen and Pinkie in front of the library on the first morning of this assignment; Pinkie, realizing Ellen was without the rest of her family, now stuck to her like glue. Ellen looked most unlike herself, dressed in a respectable tweed skirt and an almost-new navy wool cardigan. She'd put her hair up in *exact* imitation of Mary.

"You look like a proper countrywoman!" I said.

"Not a librarian?" Ellen prompted gently.

It took me a moment to realize she meant the question in earnest.

"Or a librarian," I agreed.

"Miss Kinnaird won't be able to fault my manners," Ellen said, with

the faintest hint of defiance. “But I’ll maybe have to leave the dog with you while I go in to see her the first time.”

“Don’t you want me to come along?”

She cocked her head, gazing at me fondly.

“I *do*,” she said. “But I think I should go alone. Just this once, to set myself right with Miss Kinnaird, without the Lady of the Manor about the place arranging things for us.”

Ellen smiled at me, waiting for me to back down.

“All right, Lady Julia?”

“Oh, *all right*.”

I let her go alone.

I felt very proud of her, and of Mary, and a little ashamed of myself for considering their uneasy truce to be any of my business.

Now the Procurator Fiscal was forced to demand an inquiry after all, since as a murder the case would have to go the High Court in Edinburgh rather than the local Sheriff Court. Everyone had to be interviewed all over again—including Ellen, who was with us when we found Housman’s head and shoulders (which had now been whisked away to the mortuary to join his legs).

The same dreadful trio of driver, Water Bailiff, and Inspector Duncan Milne turned up at the library to question Mary and Ellen. After grilling Mary in her own study for half an hour, they sent her back upstairs and the Inspector dragged Ellen down. As happened over at the Big House, Inspector Milne posted his bulldogs at the door and window to stop us listening in. *Thank God* Mary had established that alibi for Euan—but now I found myself panicking lest they try to pin something on Ellen instead.

Sandy and Jamie and Mary and I waited in the Upper Reading Room, where we couldn’t hear a thing. Jamie, just as fearful as I was, slumped miserably in one of the library chairs, drumming his fingers against his thigh. After a minute or so I said, “Mary, can I borrow your horn?”

She’d been flustered enough by her own interrogation that she handed the trumpet over without arguing. I lay on the floor over her study with the bell of the horn pressed flat on the smooth, old dark wood.

“Anything?” Jamie asked.

“Not a whisper,” I said in annoyance. “It’s seventeenth-century solid.”

“You need a conduit for the sound,” Jamie began, then said excitedly: “Oh, I say, try listening at the fire. The chimney downstairs probably has a flue that joins up with this one.”

Mary cried, “Darling, *be careful* with my trumpet—”

All four of us (Sandy too) knelt with our heads practically in the grate, eavesdropping on Ellen’s precognition.

Inspector Milne pestered her about where she was living. Of course she was staying by herself at Inchfort Field, where her family always camped when they were at Strathfearn, with one small bow tent just big enough to sit up in. Everything she had with her came on the bicycle. Milne asked her question after question about who might visit her there, and for how long, until she began to get angry.

She finally exclaimed heatedly—so loudly that Jamie and Sandy heard it, too, even without the aid of Mary's horn—"Naebody is in about with me! *Nae man* is in about with me! And if there were a man wi' me, what would be the wrong in it—or the business of yours?"

"I must be aware of anyone who might have had river access at the time of Dr. Housman's disappearance. Or who might have reason to return there. We need to be aware of anything that might have motivated this act of violence—a secret shared? A debt left unpaid? A fight over a woman?"

"Well, nae man I'd have about me is a hangman!" Ellen snarled.

She didn't have anything to tell them. She didn't know a thing about Hugh Housman—she'd never even *seen* him. And for all their bullying, even I could tell they didn't have anything to pin on her.

That didn't stop Sergeant Angus Henderson from giving her bicycle a good seeing-to on their way out, prodding its tires with his cromach and testing the brakes. The bicycle, which was leaning against the stone bridge as if it were embarrassed, suffered these indignities in silence.

"I swear that gadgie thinks I'm here after the salmon," Ellen said, joining us at the upstairs casement window to watch them leave. They were supposed to come back to the Big House the next day to have a go at me again, and Jamie too. "He is treating me like a poacher."

"Maybe he thinks you're after pearls," I said.

"There's no law against me taking pearls—"

She stopped abruptly. We all had the same thought. We, and we alone, knew what Hugh Housman might have been murdered for: a Keiller jam pot full of treasure.

"A *secret shared*," Jamie quoted softly, under his breath as though he were swearing.

We knew now we had to turn in the pearls we'd found.

But there in front of the library, on our own, Ellen and Jamie and I made a vow to get them out of the dovecote first. We weren't going to share the chimneys of Aberfearn Castle with the Perthshire and Kinross-shire Constabulary.

I did not at all like the thought of *someone coming back for them*. Nor of Ellen being up at Inchfort by herself.

15. Eating people up

Another interview with Inspector Milne. He didn't ask about the pearls, so I put off mentioning them. I felt I was getting good at this.

And I accepted the tickets offered me by Frank Dunbar, and I took—not Jamie—I took *Ellen* to the variety show.

I wanted to do something for her. I wanted to distract her from the horror that infected us all now—and to distract me, too. And Frank had given me two tickets and I couldn't go with *him*, of course; but if I went with Jamie, Ellen would be spending Saturday night alone up at Inchfort Field with the Salmon Stane and Hugh Housman's most unnatural ghost, and nobody but the cowardly Pinkie for company. There wasn't even a moon; it was new, and set early. So we left Pinkie-dog at the Big House for the evening, and Mummy let me have the car after I swore we wouldn't drink anything at the interval, and we sailed off to Perth for a night on the town.

The show was *wonderful*. I'd never have seen anything like that if it hadn't been for Frank. Mémère had only ever taken me to the opera, and that not often. At home it was amateur Gilbert and Sullivan or the pantomime. Once, in a moment of blazing and astonishing good fortune, Sandy met me in London on my way home from school at Christmas and we saw a new play by J. M. Barrie, *The Boy David*, with original orchestral music in the background like a moving picture. But good, old-fashioned, vulgar music hall entertainment? Not a chance.

The featured star of the variety in Perth was a person who went by the stage name "Le Sphinx." Ellen was fooled, or possibly just distracted by the fact that in addition to peppering the audience with French clichés in an American drawl, and as well as singing jazz in a sonorous deep contralto that made you want to take off your clothes and bathe in it, Le Sphinx had skin that was easily as dark as the peat we had been digging in two days ago. The singer stood in long satin gloves and a simple evening gown of bridal white that was constantly shifting to blue and lavender under the lights, with bare, thin muscular shoulders and sleek waved hair glittering with diamante clips. That incredible voice seemed to be whispering to you in *particular* (*you, you, you*) as if you were alone together in an empty Parisian nightclub—just you at a table alone with that voice and no one else.

But I was not fooled.

I glanced at Ellen, just once, and she was watching with her mouth open.

At the interval she turned to me and said simply, "Thank you. It's the

barriest show I've ever seen. Better than a month at the pictures. She's pure magic."

"She's a man," I said.

Ellen burst out laughing.

I said, "I swear it."

"She's never a man! You can see down her dress! And in front—you'd see if she was a man, in that tight dress! She never is!"

"She is. You can hide anything if you want to badly enough."

Ellen tilted her head, looking at me quizzically. "But not from you—why's that?"

"I don't know," I said, thinking about it. "I love looking for things that other people haven't noticed and then trying to fit them together, like jigsaw pieces. You know what a Sphinx is—a creature with a lion's body and a woman's head? You'd call it *she* in English. But *Le Sphinx* is masculine, so you have to say *he* in French."

"Och, away wi' you, Davie Balfour," Ellen teased. "You dinnae ken your ain he from she."

"Also, it's the answer to the Sphinx's riddle."

"What is?"

"A man. The Sphinx goes around eating people up because they don't know the answer to her riddle, and the answer is 'a man.'"

Le Sphinx wasn't in the second act, but during the interval stood with an elbow slung against the bar, sipping a cocktail that glowed green as a starboard light, and autographing programs. I linked my arm through Ellen's to give me courage and stood in the queue to get my ticket stub signed.

"Vionnet," Le Sphinx observed approvingly, in that voice like melted chocolate, casting a connoisseur's eye over my frock. "Been shopping in Paris, *chérie*?"

"It's last year's, and you know it," I said.

She gave a low and delighted chuckle. Her eyes were black as a moonless December night and reflected the electric lights like stars. "A sophisticate," she said. "Here's me thinking I was playing a hick town."

"*Je suis française*," I said. "*Et vous? Un citoyen de Paris?*"

I could feel Ellen smoldering beneath my arm, ill at ease as if she were at sea in this place. We must have looked a very odd pair, me in the shimmering silk rose-and-silver Vionnet dress with a little gold velvet evening jacket I'd borrowed from Mummy dangling over my shoulders, and Ellen in her tweed skirt and navy cardigan. She looked perfectly *nice*, but she wasn't dressed for the theater. Her glorious loose hair kept buying her slanted and disapproving looks from the other theatergoers. If I hadn't been hanging on to her with such schoolgirl-chum determination she could have easily passed as my secretary.

Or my maid. I didn't want people to think she was my maid. I didn't want her to feel like people thought she was my maid, so I hung on to

her arm as if I were propping her up. Le Sphinx eyed our partnership with curiosity, then chuckled again and boldly answered my very cheeky question. "*Oui, chérie, aujourd'hui je suis français.*"

I'd used the masculine form when I called her a *citizen* and she'd done the same when she called herself *French*.

She said in English, for Ellen's benefit, "You've guessed my riddle. Some people can tell; it's not a secret. I'm a more exciting performer as a woman, so why not?"

"You're the most exciting performer I've ever seen," I said honestly.

She grinned at me. "You're glowing, *ma petite*. You think you know men? Did you win the argument about me?"

"Yes, I won the argument, but not because I know men," I said. "It's because—I love to fool people. So I see through them, too. You do it for a living and you get it right. And it must take so much courage, to be *so different* and not be afraid of how people might react. And I—" I laughed also, at myself. "I don't think I could do what you do. But I am a Sphinx, too."

"Chameleon, maybe. There's only one Sphinx." Le Sphinx sipped at the green cocktail, then turned, catlike, on Ellen.

"And what do you think of me?"

"I think," Ellen said, "you must be always lonely."

"One of a kind is how I see it." She reached for Ellen's ticket stub and scrawled her stage name across it theatrically, not getting a single drop of green ink on the white silk gloves. "Are you afraid of me?" she asked.

"A wee bit, aye," Ellen admitted with ill-concealed resentment and fascination. She took back the ticket stub as though she expected it to bite her, avoiding touching the gloved hands.

"What about you, Vionnet? Afraid of me?"

"I wouldn't tell you if I was," I said.

"Give me a kiss, *ma petite*," said Le Sphinx, leaning down and offering her cheek. She smelled of powder and hair oil and stage paint and Chanel N°5.

I tilted her smooth chin toward mine with the tip of a finger and lightly touched our lips together. They were just like all the other lips I'd lightly touched that summer: warm and soft and full of human hope and fear and cruelty and kindness.

Ellen laughed. A handful of people at the bar applauded, and a woman in a hat flounced away.

"I like a daring girl," said Le Sphinx.

"I do try to be daring."

She laughed. Then she warned quietly, "Do try to be careful, too. You can be both."

After the show I drove Ellen back to Inchfort Field, and we didn't say much on the way; the slender moon had set by the time we were heading out of Perth. As I pulled up at the field gate she said, "Thank you, Julie."

It was braw. All of it, even the silly bits. The performing budgies!"

I snickered. "They were hilarious."

"But that Sphinx—"

She paused, then climbed up on the back of the car and lit her pipe (a new one, I supposed).

"That singer frightened me half to death. How you cheeked her! But she was wonderful—it was all *wonderful*."

Ellen passed me the pipe. I climbed up next to her and we sat on the back of the car with our feet on the seats, looking up at the stars and smoking in silence.

"I'd better go," I said at last. "It's past midnight."

"Aye," Ellen said. She swung her legs around, slid off the car, and hopped over the field gate, surefooted and at home in the dark.

"Thank you!" she called again.

Brig O'Fearn village was pitch-black. I drove cautiously. I'd never driven at night before, except coming home from Perth half an hour earlier. But Ellen had been with me then, full of smoldering warmth and wonder, and though I'd been driving carefully I hadn't been nervous. Now the road felt cool and lonely, and something new was eating at me. As I rounded the corner to take the humpbacked bridge in Brig O'Fearn, the headlamps of the Magonette splashed light over a dark, looming figure in the process of wheeling a bicycle by the handlebars down onto the river path below the bridge. The bicycle's own headlamp was only a dim pinpoint of baleful yellow without speed to generate enough power to keep it alight.

Probably the Water Bailiff going to check on the Glenfearn School, I thought; and yet the cold nagging in my stomach wouldn't go away. I kept thinking about the legend of the standing stones walking about to swim with the salmon on Harvest Night. It was only two nights off.

Only when I'd pulled the Magonette up to the Strathfearn House garages and a squealing bundle of doggy fluff half my size came bounding into my arms and knocked the wind out of me did I realize what was really bothering me.

Pinkie was *here* and Ellen was by herself in Inchfort Field, alone with the standing stones and the stars and the murdered ghost of Hugh Housman.

My prudent mother keeps a torch in her car. I took it with me to find my way along the river path so I could deliver Pinkie to her proper mistress; it would be faster to walk that way than to drive the long way round again.

The birchwood by the river, so alive with birdsong and the constant activity of the Glenfearn School by day, mostly has only one voice at night: the sound of running water. It is beautiful, but it is *so old*. It is the sound the long-dead pearl fishermen heard, the sound the Bronze Age people heard when they launched the log boat into the prehistoric River

Fearn, the sound they heard when they raised the Drookit Stane—the river has a voice that doesn't die. It is as inhuman and ancient as starlight.

The Inverfearnie Library was slumbering calmly with Mary tucked safe inside as I passed.

Even so I managed to work myself into a funk of nerves well before I got to Inchfort.

There was a light and more than one human voice by the Salmon Stane in Inchfort Field.

I switched off my torch to save the batteries. I could see the standing stone from the bottom of the field, a pure black silhouette against a less black and star-salted sky, and there was another lit electric torch burning in the long grass at the base of the stone to show me the way. Pinkie pressed close against my legs, keeping quiet and sensible, which made me think she knew who was up there. She was subdued and submissive, but she wasn't paralyzed with fear.

Presumably Ellen wasn't either.

When I got closer I could see that there were two people there, faintly foot-lit by the torch on the ground as if they were onstage. One was Ellen, with her back against the stone like Joan of Arc tied to the stake. The man she was facing held her prisoner with a stick like a spear shaft pinning her arms and chest against the stone. She was struggling like a salmon and spitting protests.

Pinkie dropped and cowered silently.

"I didnae!" Ellen swore.

"The librarian's seen ye," said the other. "And I've seen ye. Bold as brass, beneath her door, on the footbridge, on the path. Do you not bring your young man here the night?"

"I never had a man here—never, day or night, never! I said so to the Inspector—you heard—it was he as said I did that, not I! I'm working at the library with the Earl of Strathfearn—I don't—No, I *won't*—*Oh!*" She gasped, and twisted at the waist, and I could not see what his free hand was doing to her.

The man said in a low, clear voice, "Aye, but ye will, ye teasing tinkie hussy, ye will. Or I'll have your brother arrested for the murder of yon Professor Housman. Ye ken? He'll hang for it."

He could, I suddenly realized with horror. *He could*. Housman could have been killed *after* I saw him; he probably *was*. Mary's alibi for Euan only made sense if Housman had committed suicide—if he'd waded away into the river right after I saw him. It wouldn't work if Housman had been murdered later.

"*No!*" Ellen's entire body made another wrenching bid for freedom, and she suddenly let out a squealing, outraged sob. "O God, I'll have you down Sheriff Court mysel', I swear, you filthy scaldy bastard!"

"And whose word will they take, lassie, yours or mine?"

There was no way in the world I was ever again going to stand frozen, frightened and cowed and passive, and watch this man launch a violent attack on any McEwen.

I lit my own electric torch and shone it at his head.

“Angus Henderson,” I said coldly, “what the bloody hell are you doing?”

He turned swiftly, and got a faceful of light. I knew he couldn’t see a thing.

Instinctively he raised his cromach, freeing Ellen, and hit out at me. The staff caught me a thudding thump on the shoulder that knocked me sideways onto one knee.

I dropped the torch with a shrieking gasp.

Pinkie, surely in desperation, did the bravest thing she’s probably ever done in her life and leaped at Henderson with a snarl.

“Pinkie! Down! No!” Ellen yelled. “Down!” She wrestled the dog to the ground.

My arm was numb. I scrabbled for the torch with shaking, unsteady fingers.

“Let her go, Ellen!”

“No,” Ellen said, crouched holding the dog tight against her. “One dunt o’ that cromach will break her skull.”

“Oh.”

Suddenly I felt sure I knew how I’d got that dunt on the head.

The river watcher was towering over me, a dark shadow like the standing stone. My frantic fingers found the torch at last, cold and solid metal, and I aimed its beam into his craggy face, trying to blind him. I could hear my own breath coming harsh and fast, and swallowed bile.

“Oh, Angus Henderson,” I articulated carefully, getting to my feet. I licked my lips. “You want to dally with a lassie in the dark? Come kiss me. Come here—”

He was frozen in the beam of my torch like a hare, baffled by this turn of events. “Why—”

I stepped closer, bringing myself toe to toe with him. “Come along, big man.”

I hooked my hand around the base of his skull and pulled his face down to mine. My shoulder felt like it was in flames. I found his mouth and kissed him like I meant it, hard and deep.

And I did mean it—but not as a kiss. I meant it as a threat, and a warning, and a *curse*—

He pulled our mouths apart and backed away from me. I’d spooked him. Tangled up with the hysterical dog and the blinding beam of the light and the two conspiring girls, he was no longer so sure of either his strength or his authority.

“Do I know you? You’re no’ one of them travelling folk—”

He could hear that in the dripping sarcasm of my exaggeratedly

aristocratic voice.

"You know me in the day," I said. I held up the torch and poured light down my body, over the borrowed gold velvet bolero jacket and the flimsy rose georgette and all the curves and corners that lay barely hidden beneath. "I'm Julia Beaufort-Stuart."

"Och, *Lady Julia*," he breathed, and took another step back.

"You can kiss me if you like," I said. "I don't mind. You can stand here and have me up against the stone like you were going to—"

"You know I never would, Lady Julia!"

"*I don't know that*," I said. "You took me for a dirty tinker once before, didn't you, when you thought you'd found me poaching Strathfearn's trout by the Drookit Stane? What did you do then? Thumped me on the head for fun!"

"I didnae! I didnae touch you!"

I didn't believe a word of this denial.

"You carried me up the path to Inchfort Field so you could make it look like some McEwen lad had done the damage," I accused.

"Aye, I did that, but I didnae *touch you*," Henderson elaborated meaningfully, if you can call changing the meaning of your words by changing your tone *elaboration*.

"*You can now*," I said. "Come on, big man, I'm *gasping* for you! Maybe I'll like it and not tell anyone. But maybe I'll say you forced me, here in the dark when I was bringing Ellen home from the theater. *And whose word will they take, Angus, yours or mine?*"

He stood frozen and silent for a long moment.

"Speak one false word against Euan McEwen," I warned coolly, "and I'll tell my lady mother that you raped me."

He dropped a few cold, angry words at my feet.

"You filthy wee bitch."

Then he picked up his own fallen torch, and took his cromach, and strode away down the field to wherever it was he'd left his bicycle.

We heard him rattling away and for a few seconds watched the light of his headlamp bobbing like a will-o'-the-wisp through the birchwood. Then he was gone.

Ellen gasped. "He could—"

"*He won't dare.*"

"O God pity me, Julie, I cannae stay here alone the night," she sobbed.

I was still trembling. I felt like I'd been dropped down one of the Aberfearn Castle chimneys.

"Of course you can't," I said. "Come back with me."

There wasn't any place to put Ellen in the Big House except in my

narrow bed, so that's where we both collapsed, with our arms tight around each other so we wouldn't fall out. Ellen fell asleep almost straightaway. But I lay awake with my heart full of hatred and love so evenly distributed I felt like my chest was going to explode, and my head full of the deathless, chill voice of the river and the living, volcanic voice of Le Sphinx, winding me in night and day and "Night and Day."

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16. *An' wha dare meddle wi' me?*

Getting dressed the next morning I had a scrap with Mother, who grabbed me by the arm so suddenly it shocked me into a howl of pain.

"Julia, how on *earth* did you get that black mark across your shoulder? You look as if you've been hit by a train! You can't wear your birthday frock with that—it has no sleeves!"

"That's where Sergeant Henderson hit me with his cromach."

I told her about what had happened at Inchfort Field last night.

"Hanging's too good for him. That man ought to be *horsewhipped* first," Mother said furiously.

"Mary thinks he is a dear."

Mother went raging down to the hall telephone to ring the police again.

Ellen spent all of Sunday morning sulking and scaffing Mémère's French coffee in a corner of the morning room, with Jamie waiting on her like a knight's squire. Much the way he waits on me. Watching him sitting on the floor at her feet, pouring her another cup and stirring in sugar without even having to ask how many she wanted, I realized whom the river watcher had meant when he'd said he'd *seen* her with someone, *bold as brass*.

And why wouldn't she and Jamie have kissed on the footbridge to the library as bold as brass, if they wanted to? They were the same age. They weren't married to other people. No one told them not to. It wasn't like me and Frank Dunbar.

Sly old Jamie! He didn't kiss her any time *I* might have seen it.

He looked up at me just as I was putting this together, saw that I had twigged him, and blushed.

I didn't think Ellen could be any more serious with Jamie than she was with me. She was enjoying herself, testing the peaty water. Probably he was, too.

But my heart twisted a little enviously that they could do it in daylight.

"Are you thinking of challenging Angus Henderson to a duel?" I asked. "Because don't forget he strangled a German officer with his bare hands, and you are not a lot bigger than me."

"What stupid sort of fox challenges a hound?" Jamie parried. "I've a better idea. Let's get Ellen out of the Strathfearn estate at night."

He glanced up at her. "There's a good train to Comrie from Brig O'Fearn every two hours. I'll take you and Pinkie tomorrow and show you how to change at Perth. You can stay with your own folk and take

the train to work—like a banker!”

That was Sunday; it was August bank holiday on Monday and the building works were quiet and the police did not get back to us.

Then while Mother and I were in Perth on Tuesday, having my fairy dress altered to be made more modest, representatives of the Perthshire and Kinross-shire Constabulary arrived at the Big House and arrested Solange on a charge of murder for the death of Dr. Hugh Housman.

Unbelievable, unbearable gloom descended on Strathfearn House.

Mother was hardly ever there that week. She launched a one-woman assault on His Majesty’s Prison in Perth, seeing to it that Solange was supplied with every comfort a prisoner was allowed, even attempting to send her armfuls of roses (they had to sit in the prison office). Many telephone calls were made to Father in Craig Castle, and to Mémère’s sister in France, concerning lawyers. Mémère kept up her stoic folding of hankies with Colette in attendance, and Jamie and I worked with Sandy and Ellen to pull together the catalog for the Murray Collection. We weren’t allowed to visit Solange, and the catalog had to be completed regardless of the Murray and Beaufort-Stuart household’s emotional state.

“The Strathfearn Murder” (it was officially murder now) was shouted in all the papers *every day*. For a few days it was relegated to the inside pages, but the inevitable postmortem revealed that the killing was utterly horrific. The poor fellow wasn’t *just* garroted. Perhaps he was like Rasputin and simply *wouldn’t die*? He was so battered that now “the examining doctor has not been able to determine the actual cause of death.”

There was a great hole in the back of his head where his skull was bashed in, and also—ugh—his throat had been cut.

How could they *possibly* believe it was Solange! Surely the Water Bailiff was the most likely suspect when it came to brutal violence?

But even I could see that he had no motive. If he’d known about the pearls, he’d have taken them away weeks ago and we’d never have found them. And Solange had admitted to striking Dr. Housman. She’d admitted to a fight. She’d admitted to *winning*. And no one had seen either one of them that afternoon except me, and everything I’d seen suggested that she *could* have come along to finish the job. She was even intimate enough with him that she could have hidden his clothes.

Eventually the papers printed pictures of all the wounds. Not photographs, which I suppose would have been too lurid even for the *Mercury*. They were just pencil drawings.

“They’re not as good as yours,” I told Ellen when I showed her.

“That’s not what the rope looked like at all. They’ve made it look like something you’d lead a pony with. It was bonnier than that.”

“Bonnie! What, you mean, *prettier*?”

She scowled. She had been fearsomely crabbit, even for Ellen, since Henderson smeared her with his mucky paws.

“Aye, *prettier* than that, all right, Lady Julia? Like a—a dressing-gown cord.”

“Decorative, you mean?”

“Stop telling me what I mean!”

I thought she was angry that I had had to come to her rescue. Not that I *did*—she’d been glad to be rescued—but that *I had to*. She couldn’t have saved herself, and we both knew it. And it was the good fortune of my being “Lady Julia” that let me do it. It was embarrassing to both of us.

I also had an argument with Sandy. Of all people.

It was my own stupid fault, especially as I’d already remarked that he was ready to take on *anyone*. It started innocently enough, when we were all having rare drinks on the terrace on the Thursday after Mother came home from visiting Solange. We were just all so tired of being miserable that Mémère started pouring sherry.

“And Jamie, take one to Monsieur Dunbar,” she said magnanimously. “It is awkward him always sitting at work there with his terrace doors standing open.”

I sat quiet, pointedly pretending I hadn’t heard and didn’t care. I had been very cautious all summer long about not letting Mother or Solange know about my crush on Frank Dunbar. But it was not a secret that Frank was so at home in his office adjoining the morning room that it had become a little den.

Jamie disappeared next door with a sherry glass and came back a minute or so later commenting, “That man is in desperate need of a housekeeper. There’s cheese parings and a half-eaten loaf of bread going stale among his blueprints.”

“Am I going to be remembered for leaving a legacy of mice to this house?” Mémère exclaimed.

I bit my lip. I couldn’t possibly leap to Frank’s defense without giving myself away.

Mother sighed. “We really ought to have been more thoughtful of him over the past month. He could have certainly joined us for soup or cold meats from time to time. I suppose we should ask Mary to join us more often, too.”

“I do ask her.” Sandy, who’d been standing at the stone railing gazing out over the grounds of his lost realm, joined in the conversation unexpectedly. “I asked her to come round tonight. But there’s a lecture at the library—‘Victorian Angling’—and she has to be there to serve sandwiches.”

Sandy paused, then turned around deliberately to face us all. “And I’ve asked her to come along to the shoot with me on Opening Day,” he

announced a little defiantly. "Perhaps even let her take the gun a time or two. She shoots rather well."

He sat down on the railing. I went and sat down next to him.

He turned to me. He looked as tired as Mother. He said to me in a low voice, "I didn't ask her to the Menzieses' party after the shoot because I thought you should do that yourself, Julie. It being your birthday."

"Oh!" I hadn't thought about it. "Am I allowed to ask people? But Mary never goes to parties."

"She might if she were asked. She's a great deal more of an explorer than you might think. She's giving Miss Ellen McEwen a good second thought."

"Yes, she is." I had to admit she was doing that. I wondered if I could ask Ellen to the party, too. But I didn't quite dare. It wasn't *really* my party. I didn't want to offend or upset Mrs. Menzies, or indeed Mémère herself.

I sulked, feeling cowardly and Victorian.

"I want Mary to get out more," Sandy confessed. "She'll have to, if I marry her."

"Sandy!" I teased. "Would you really?"

"Well, why not?"

"But what if she wants children?"

He stared at me as uncomprehendingly as if I'd spoken in cant. "What if she does?"

"They might be like her. Isn't it risky?"

"They might all be as beautiful as you," he said coldly, "which would be riskier."

I felt properly slapped.

Sandy took a swallow of his sherry.

"They'd be your nieces and nephews, in any case," he added. "So get used to the idea."

I thought about it and felt so ashamed of myself I wanted to weep.

O brave new world that has such people in't!

I lay awake trying to find some cast-iron way to prove Solange's innocence, of which we were all convinced. The only piece of hard evidence I had to offer were the pearls in the jam pot. I still didn't understand the connection, but I felt certain it existed. It would be worth giving up our priceless, pointless heritage to save Solange's life.

And at exactly the right time, the McEwens came back. They were getting ready to work with their cousins the Camerons on the shoot at Glenmoredun Castle on Opening Day—loading guns, beating the grouse out of the heather on the moor, and collecting the dead birds afterward. In the meantime they were harvesting flax at Bridge Farm, except Ellen, who was now being reimbursed for her time by the Murray Estate itself

at considerably higher wages than Euan was ever paid for *his* time digging on the pipeline for the Glenfearn School swimming baths.

So it wasn't just Jamie and I who went to collect the pearls from hiding, but the full reconnaissance party who had found them in the first place. We all wanted to see them again, Ellen and Euan just as much as we Beaufort-Stuarts, and we knew the only place to do it safely was right there in the dovecote under the last roofed room of Aberfearn Castle.

I dressed for mountaineering in proper shoes and trousers, but did not take into account the sore shoulder until I was halfway up the chimney.

The going got harder and harder. Euan came up last, behind me, and I grew aware of him having to wait for me.

"I'm going to stop for a minute," I told him, pressing my back against one wall of the chimney shaft with my feet braced against the other wall and my legs across the empty air so I could take the weight off my arms. "I think you can squeeze past."

He climbed up to where I was and wedged himself alongside me.

"I'll bide wi' you."

"I don't suppose you've got a pipe? This is the *perfect* place for a smoke."

Euan laughed, but answered ruefully, "No, Ellen's got it." His long legs seemed awfully bunched up next to me.

"You'd make a terrible chimney sweep," I said.

It wasn't as though he could carry me down, or catch me if I fell. But being packed so tight actually did make me feel safer.

We heard the rush of wings as Jamie and Ellen emerged in the attic above us and startled the wood pigeons away. After a minute or two Ellen called down the murky shaft after her brother.

"Sproul kinchen!"

"Sproul kinchen yourself!" Euan cried back. "Our Davie's having a rest."

"Our Jamie's getting worried," she told us. "Have a rest at the top."

I gritted my teeth and fought my way up. Jamie reached through the broken chimney wall to help pull me out onto the solid floor of the lost room.

"What's wrong?"

"My shoulder hurts. Bother."

"It's easier going down."

"I know."

As a consolation for my being pathetic they let me be the one to free the pearls.

Ellen had brought along polishing equipment in her fisherman's creel—soft puffs of cotton wool and a jar of baby oil and a swath of elegant fabric to tip the treasure out on. "Mam says pearls look best on black velvet," she said.

They looked marvelous on black velvet—all their subtle hues more

vivid. We played with them as if we were babies playing with alphabet blocks.

"These aren't just the Reliquary pearls," Ellen said. "There's too many."

"I know. Granddad must have collected some of them himself," I said.

"It's a shame they've been mixed. We'll never know which are the oldest."

Ellen lined up the big gray Tay pearl beads, the ones that matched. Against the black velvet they seemed to glow silvery-white as moonlight. Against the black velvet they looked like—

Ellen and I gave a unified shriek of excitement and disbelief.

"The library pearls!"

"They're the same as Mary Queen of Scots' bracelet."

We had to explain it to our baffled brothers.

"They're a match with the pearls on display in the Inverfearnie Library—"

"An exact match!"

"They're from—"

"The same set!"

"It must have been—"

"A necklace. A necklace to match the bracelet."

Jamie let out a soft and fervent oath.

Euan breathed quietly, "*Mary Queen o' Scots' own necklace? How?*"

"The ones in the library were a gift to the Murrays," I reminded him.

Half the birds had come back to roost grudgingly in the top dove holes. They settled into their soft chirruping murmur, a sound as timeless as the river, yet alive and warm. They warbled in the background as I enthusiastically constructed a plausible history for Mary Stuart's lost pearls. "Maybe she gave the Murrays the necklace and bracelet together, but then the necklace broke and someone put the pearls in the Reliquary with the other pearls, and they forgot about them, and a hundred and fifty years later when the donation was made to the library only the bracelet was left—"

Ellen interrupted suddenly: "I smell smoke."

We had our backs to the hole in the wall we'd come in by. Ellen turned around. She said, "The chimney's smoking!"

We all spun round to look.

A soft roll of cloud was spilling out of the broken chimney wall and over the old wooden floor like haar mist. It was opaque, a pale and milky gray, the same color as the Tay pearls in the shadow of a fold of cloth.

"That's torn it," Jamie said. "We're stuck here!"

We couldn't get back down a chimney filled with smoke.

All of us started to chatter at once, like the wood pigeons, trying to keep our voices low.

"If this place catches fire we are cooked," I hissed.

"It's a chimney," Jamie pointed out. "It's supposed to smoke!"

Ellen said through her teeth, "But who set the fire? Sergeant Henderson, trying to smoke us out?"

We stared at each other with drained faces.

"We might be able to climb down holding our breath," I said. "Or breathe through handkerchiefs. If we did it quickly—"

"*Could you?*" Ellen asked sharply.

"I'd try," I said. "I could if I had to."

"We could have boiled a can of tea in the time it took you to get up. You cannae hold your breath so long."

"I don't think it's Henderson, and I don't think he's trying to kill us," Jamie said in a low voice. "Not by building a fire in a fireplace, even if it is five hundred years old. I think it's the fellow who's been camping here. I think he heard our voices and now he's trying to trap us for a little while so he can clear off. He's been here a long time without getting caught."

"So we bide until the fire burns out?" Ellen asked.

"Aye, we could bide...." Jamie stuck his head out the door to the empty stairwell where the stone spiral had long ago collapsed, knowing there wasn't a chance of getting down there. Then he moved to the mullioned window. "I wonder, though...." He leaned out, then turned around to look at us. He stood silhouetted against gray sky.

"Sandy says that he and Davie and Archie had a race one time. Before you and I and Grant were born, Julie. Up this tower, along the wall of the keep and down the kitchen chimney. You have to do this first bit like you're rock-climbing, just hanging on with hands and feet. There's no ledge till you get to the wall of the keep."

"We've climbed the kitchen chimney," said Euan. "But it's not so narrow as this one. You have to climb it the whole way using hands and feet as you said. And it slopes in the way at the top. It's no' easy." He nodded toward me. "She couldnae."

"She doesn't need to," Jamie said. "If I go, I can put out the fire."

"Or we could bide," I said.

Jamie said forcefully, "*I want to catch him at it.*"

Euan stood up. "I'll go along wi' you."

"Jamie Stuart," Ellen told him, "take my knife."

Euan went first. Ellen and I watched our brothers crawl one at a time through the mullioned window, cling like spiders to the stone wall as they inched their way from our window to the roofless wall of the ruined castle's central keep, and begin the precarious journey across that wall, five stories up and with a sheer drop on either side.

Then they had to scale the outside of the huge kitchen chimney. First Euan, long-limbed but lithe and efficient, lowered himself inside while

Jamie sat perched on the topmost surviving stone of Aberfearn Castle, waiting his turn with his legs dangling down the chimney; then he, too, was gone.

Now there wasn't anything for me and Ellen to do but wait.

I hugged myself, still reeling with the discovery we'd made. "We're the Aberfearn Castle guardians," I said. "We're the guardians of—"

"Mary Queen o' Scots' jewels!" Ellen finished.

The smoke continued to billow blue and foul across the attic floor. It was coming out here and using the whole dovecote as a chimney because of the broken wall.

Ellen added soberly, "Let's be proper guardians. We'd best get those pearls away."

In the time it took to dump the pearls back into the jam jar we were both choking and weeping. The air of the little room was quickly turning poisonous. Ellen tore the black velvet swatch in half; I had to hold the cloth over her face and mine while she stowed the jar in her creel basket. Now my eyes and throat were burning and we were both wheezing, overwhelmed with the acrid smoke. The wood pigeons took off again.

"Bloody hell," I spluttered, as we stuck our heads back out the window, gulping in fresh air, one of us on each side of the stone mullion. Smoke wreathed around us as it, too, found its way out of the broken room into the sky, so that there was no way for us to avoid it. My eyes were streaming as if I'd been rubbing them with pepper; I tied the velvet cloth fast over my nose and mouth. We squinted at the narrow stone parapet that led across the ruin to the kitchen chimney.

"Could you?" Ellen suggested dubiously, her voice harsh and grating. Euan said she'd climbed the kitchen chimney before.

But I didn't think I could. My shoulder wouldn't support me.

Ellen just seemed like her usual naturally grim self, so I didn't want to show her that I'd never felt so frightened in my life.

"We could climb out this window and sit on the wall, I suppose," I choked, although I didn't really believe I could manage to spider across to the wall of the keep without splattering myself among the stones and nettles five stories beneath us, either.

A cascade of happy barks came peeling up from somewhere far below.

"Well, they've found my dog," said Ellen.

"Nell," I said, and took her hand.

"Don't fret, lass," she told me through her own soft black mask.

"I'm not fretting. I just want to hold on to you."

"You look like a train robber!"

"So do you."

Her defiant determination braced me a little.

She sang softly: "*My castle is aye my ain, An' harried it ne'er shall be,
For I'll fall ere it's ta'en—*"

"An' wha dare meddle wi' me?"

Our voices nearly twined together once more, but she broke off in a spasm of choking coughs.

"Don't sing for me," I told her. "Just breathe."

She let go of my hand so she could wreath her arm around my waist from behind. When I wove my own arm beneath hers, she clasped my hand against her ribs on the other side. We clung to each other as if we were drowning.

We were drowning.

After what seemed like another very long time we heard Euan calling up the chimney, just as Ellen had called down earlier.

"Sproul!"

We glanced around quickly, and we couldn't see a thing through the smoke that was still hanging in the tower room.

It took us a long moment to realize Jamie and Euan must have put the fire out.

I'm sure neither Ellen nor I noticed how tightly we were holding on to each other until we both went limp with relief. Then, after one last tearful hug, we tried to get back to the chimney.

But the smoke hadn't yet cleared enough for us even to turn around for more than a second or two, let alone cross the room, so we had to wait before we were able to hoarsely answer Euan's call. Jamie said later that it was the most fearsome part of the whole afternoon—that silent ten minutes before the smoke cleared, when they called and called until their own throats were raw and got no answer from us.

I am very glad that wasn't something I had to do. If it were the other way around—me wondering if Jamie were alive or dead...Not knowing. At any rate...

At any rate, we weren't dead.

It seemed *ages* before the chimney was sufficiently smokeless that we could climb back down. But we managed it at last, Ellen with the pearls stowed safely in her creel basket. The climb itself *was* easier than going up—gravity helps when you're on your way down. Pinkie, yapping her encouraging love from below us, helped, too.

Jamie caught Ellen, then me, in the hearth of the Earl's Chamber at the bottom. The entire floor was a mess of damp, half-burned scraps of reed and gorse and heather and birch, slippery and deceptively awash with what must have been a tiny amount of water from the stolen builder's bucket Jamie had brought with him from the kitchen fireplace. We three knelt on the old hearth in a clinging, grateful huddle like a bundle of kittens for a moment, with the frantic dog bouncing around us. Then Jamie untangled himself, stood up, and pointed.

"He says he's not a killer. I rather believe him. He's too scared to say

anything else. We had to bully him a bit so he'd help us stamp out the fire, though. *He didn't want to ruin his shoes.*"

The man they'd caught was cowering in a corner of the empty room with Euan standing casual guard nearby, and, oh, this was surely Euan McEwen's finest hour: he stood straight and impassive making use of his full six-feet-two-inches or whatever it is, holding Ellen's knife half-raised as if he were ready to toss it like a dart straight between the creeping villain's eyes the second he made a false move.

"Who is he?" Ellen said.

"He won't say."

"Oh, will he not?" she murmured in her best Lady Macbeth.

He was the very model of a tramp, with a full but badly barbered beard, wearing an unraveling tweed jacket, a stained shirt, and an ill-fitting faded kilt with half the pleats let out of it to make it bigger.

It was Sandy's kilt; my kilt.

It was the kilt that had disappeared from the Magnette the night they found Housman's legs.

"He's the one who's been nicking everything," I said.

"He's nicked Housman's spectacles. Remember the broken spectacles? He had the other half. We nicked them back."

Jamie patted his cartridge bag, and the craven person in the corner suddenly protested, "Do be careful with those specs—I'm blind as a bat without them."

His voice was cultured and *English*.

"Jamie," I said. "Give him back his specs."

"It's quite useful keeping him blind as a bat," Jamie said. "He stopped fighting when we got them off him."

"Give them back. I want to see what he looks like when he has them on."

Jamie opened his bag and gracelessly passed the broken wire-rimmed glasses back to the prisoner, who sulkily put them on.

"Look down," I told him.

Very cowed by whatever his encounter with Jamie and Euan had been, he obeyed.

I took a step toward him.

"Bend over."

With a frightened little gulp, again he obeyed.

"Now look up. *Look at me.*"

He raised his head, blinking at me over the top of the battered gold spectacles, and met my eyes.

"You're *Hugh Housman.*"

Not dead.

Not a ghost.

Alive and cringing and criminal and bewildered.

"*Solange!* What about *Solange?*" I cried out in fury. "Waiting for trial

like Mary Queen of Scots! You weasel! All those professions of love and you skulk here hiding while she's been accused of your *murder*?"

I could see by his expression that he wasn't aware of this turn of events, but I couldn't stop—the accusations and outrage came pouring out of me.

"Someone's dead—my God, who in blazes is that poor man they fished out of the river? Solange didn't kill *him*—did *you*? Did Angus Henderson have anything to do with it?" I stopped to breathe. "I say, did you see Henderson? *Did you see Henderson hit me?*" Then I began to cough again.

The man was now nodding his head tremulously, but it was impossible to know to which of my battery of questions he was responding.

Euan had backed away, gaping. None of the rest of us would have known Housman—I was the only one who'd seen him before. I turned to Jamie, who was also gaping. "Can he walk?" I demanded.

"Aye."

"Let's take him to the Big House and call the police."

The miserable Dr. Housman suddenly leaped into life.

"I've done nothing—at least I don't think I have—"

"Well, we have to call the police, because *Solange is in prison*," I snarled.

"Because of *me*? But all I did was leave my post," he said plaintively. "I—I needed some time alone. I knew she'd be upset, but I thought she'd understand my message....I never thought..."

Now we *all* gaped at him. I realized he was taking a gamble, guessing we didn't know about the stolen pearls.

"I left my post," he admitted again. "I've lost my position. I beg your pardon, young lady, but I think I did witness your—your accident last month."

"You *saw* the Water Bailiff hit me! You actually saw him hit me? You know! What happened? You know!"

I'd advanced on Housman, which scared him back into confused and sullen silence. Jamie was right: the man was far too much of a coward to have killed anyone. Not on purpose, anyway. My God: I was ready to twist the details out of him with a corkscrew.

But no—I could see that wouldn't work. He'd been lurking here for over a month waiting for the dust to clear and a quiet opportunity to get those pearls back, and hadn't once been brazen enough or devious enough to manage it.

Maybe he hadn't even thought it was possible to change his original plan to collect them at the end of the summer. There'd been too many builders and newspapermen, and us coming and going, and the River Watcher patrolling the path, and Sandy camped at the Inverfearnie Library and the McEwens camped in Inchfort Field, and the high water in

the Fearn after all that rain.

Hugh Housman was a scholar. He wasn't a natural thug and he wasn't naturally bold. He needed babying. I wouldn't get anything out of him if the police whisked him away.

"Och, Euan, give Ellen back her knife," I said. "What this Sassenach needs is a cup of tea. Let's take him to the Big House and turn him over to Francis Dunbar."

"Aye, maybe it'll give Dunbar a chance to do something right for a change," Jamie said.

"Oh yes, Dunbar!" Dr. Housman agreed with hangdog haste. "I expect he's had a rough time of it—my fault as well, he never should have had to answer for me—" He shut up guiltily again.

Ellen put her knife back in her creel. Mild-mannered Euan, enjoying his first taste of authority, told Dr. Housman, "Stop quaking, man. The daft dog's more likely to hurt you than I am. Come away."

"I can't wait to see the headline in the *Mercury*," Jamie said cruelly. "Narrow Escape for Drowned Man."

I chummed Dr. Housman along as we made our way back to the Big House, with Pinkie at our heels being very forgiving now that we were all heading in the same direction.

"Lovely creature," Housman said. "Tan Border collie? What's she called?"

"Pinkie. She's not mine. She belongs to her." I pointed toward Ellen. "A gift from the late Earl of Strathfearn."

"Oh," he said, surprised at the combination of tinker lass and purebred hound.

"Perhaps you'd prefer brandy to tea!" I suggested winningly, at my most devious. "You must have had a rough time of it, too. I don't understand why you've been hiding! If you saw the Water Bailiff knock me out, why didn't you just tell someone right away? Francis Dunbar, or Mary Kinnaird, for example? I was off my head for three days and nobody knew who I was!"

"I—well—I was fishing for pearls when the—what did you call him?"

"The Water Bailiff."

"Yes. No." Housman added hastily, "I *didn't* see him hit you. But I saw him carrying you. And he saw me. He threatened that if I gave him away he'd haul *me* in for assaulting you. And it could have easily been me. I couldn't prove...I was afraid..."

Irritatingly, he let that sentence go unfinished.

I forced myself to be patient with him.

"That's why you didn't tell anyone," I said. "I still don't understand why you *hid*."

"I'm sorry—"

He was panting a little; we were walking at a youthful pace and he was not young. And of course, he'd been living on stolen sandwiches for

a month.

"I'm sorry," he repeated sheepishly. "Who are the others with you?"

I thought: Oh, don't you try to change the subject, you wee weasel of a man.

I answered his question, but I wasn't going to be so familiar as to give him *our* names. Let him wonder.

"The short fair one is my brother; the tall ginger ones are friends of ours who stay here in the summer. They took me to the hospital after the Water Bailiff hit me."

"I—I'm sorry," he stammered for the third time. "I didn't see him hit you."

It was almost as though he was trying to tell me Henderson *hadn't* hit me.

Fleetinglly, I wondered if Housman could possibly have hit me himself.

But as he rabbitied on, I couldn't believe he was remotely capable of committing an act of violence against *anyone*.

"When Henderson left me there with you, I realized I truly might get blamed for the attack," Housman said. "I thought you were going to *die*. And then it would look like I'd killed you. And I panicked. So I hid. I didn't really know what to do when the lifeboats first started searching for me....I hoped it would all blow over if I didn't turn up."

"You perfect coward," I sympathized patronizingly. "Please don't tell me again that you're sorry. Scavenging sandwiches and newspapers from the workers at the Big House! And was that also you pawing through the McEwens' things while they slept? You're a disgrace to academia."

It took every fiber of my being not to scream at him: *WHAT ABOUT MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS' PEARLS, YOU SNEAKING WEASEL?*

"Why didn't you just light out back to England and make up some scholarly excuse?" I asked. "To stop everyone thinking you'd drowned yourself?"

He fell abruptly silent. The rest of what he'd told me was probably true—it fit the jigsaw properly. But the answer to this particular question was, *I wanted to go back for those three hundred and twenty-seven pearls I hid in the river*, and he wasn't going to tell me that.

He hadn't given up on going back for them.

And with Solange still in prison—

Greedy, treacherous little coward! I thought. Go see if you can find them now. Good luck to you.

17. The Glorious Twelfth

The morning after we discovered Hugh Housman hiding in Aberfearn Castle, Ellen telephoned me from the Inverfearnie Library to tell me I must come see her at once.

I did not go rushing out there in a blaze of curiosity. The events of the past fortnight had left me wary and cautious of strangers. It *sounded* like Ellen on the 'phone, but it could have been *anyone*. I thought irrelevantly of Housman's "damned unfeeling" sister. After I hung up I sat on the bottom step in the hall swithering for ten minutes, and then rang back just to prove the call *had* come from the library.

Mary answered. Yes, she'd let Miss McEwen use the telephone. Miss McEwen had paid her twopence to put the call through.

"Do you think I should come?" I asked, irrationally cautious.

"What is the matter with you, Julia? Why wouldn't you come see her if she wants you to? I thought she was your friend."

Ellen met me by the iron footbridge. She was carrying a large brown envelope.

I thought of pearls.

"What is going on?" I asked.

"I want to show you something."

"Where's Pinkie?"

The envelope was flat. It couldn't be pearls.

"In Miss Kinnaird's kitchen. Pinkie's not let through to the other rooms, but Miss Kinnaird has fallen in love with that dog."

"She's pure magic, our Pinkie."

"Come along," Ellen said, and strode ahead of me across the circular drive of the library, the gravel crunching beneath her feet. She moved with force and purpose and I had to keep making uneven little skips to keep up with her, because her legs are so much longer than mine.

"Where are we going?"

"That flat rock by the Drookit Stane—I want to show this to you before I show Strathfearn."

She meant Sandy.

"I want to see what you think," she added.

When we reached the flat rock at the beachy place she sat down and slid a sheaf of glossy paper from the envelope.

"Come look."

I sat beside her.

"The photographer from the *Mercury*, that Catriona Lennox, sent us these this morning," Ellen said. "It just says 'Strathfearn Log Boat Excavation Project' in the address, so I opened it because I took in the post. No one else has seen it."

They were the photographs Miss Lennox had taken during the morning we'd first begun our salvage operation. Ellen shuffled through them rapidly; I watched over her shoulder.

"You ken what you're looking at?" she asked.

"Aye."

"What's this one, then?"

"That's looking close at the bit of cord tied to the boat."

"So what's this?"

"That's it again."

"Is it?"

I frowned. "Well yes, or another angle—it's the same bit of rope."

"Why?" She held the two photographs up before me.

The camera must have been very close, but it made the detail perfectly clear. "You can see that crisscross woven pattern in it, there and there," I said. "This bit's mostly crushed or decayed, but you can see they're the same, can't you?"

"Aye," she said in an expressionless voice. "I can see that. I wanted to know if you could, too."

She didn't lower her hands, but held the pictures up, waiting.

"But that's not the boat," I whispered. "The rope's the same, but that picture—"

"*The rope's the same*," Ellen echoed.

The photographer had accidentally included a picture of the rope that had strangled the murdered man. She'd shot it so close that his decayed skin beneath it was as dark and cakey as the wood of the Bronze Age boat.

But the rope was the same.

"He can't have been killed with anything that old!" I said. "You saw how fragile it was!"

Ellen said softly, "Maybe it wasnae sae old when he was killed."

She let that sink in. She'd had a bit longer than me to get used to the idea. For me, it was as if a half-completed jigsaw had been flipped upside down and now I was looking at a completely unfamiliar picture.

"You're saying the dead man's *as old as the log boat*?"

"All I'm saying is it's the same rope."

I shook my head.

"Two ends of the same rope," Ellen suggested. "Maybe even one end tied to the boat, one end tied round his neck."

I had a wild vision of a person being dragged to death by a boat. No, of course not. "He was buried in the boat," I said slowly.

"Maybe."

"Did people *do* that?"

"Not in the Bronze Age. They're mostly buried in wee chests, crouching. But...the Vikings did it. People have found ship burials in Norway, and in England. And deep water was sacred to the Picts, who were here before the Christians...."

"The burn's not very deep at the mouth of the Fearn!"

"They buried him in the peat, below the riverbed. Places where rivers meet are sacred, too. He's beneath the crossing of two rivers, downstream of the Drookit Stane. And that killing—the triple death—that's a sacrifice."

"How d'you know all *that*?" I exclaimed in disbelief. "Old Travellers' tales passed down from Auntie Bessie?"

Ellen gave her snort of scorn and answered coldly, "*Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*. But true enough, Auntie Bessie likely has a thing or two to say about it."

"I'm sorry."

She put the photographs back in the envelope and got out her pipe and tobacco pouch.

"Have a draw."

She gave me the matches. When she'd filled the bowl she let me light it myself, laughing at my incompetence. "Why have you no' been practicing?"

"I don't want to break the one you gave me. I want to take it to school to rag the other girls."

We smoked in silence for a couple of minutes, listening to the timeless voice of the burn as it chuckled past the Drookit Stane, thinking about our ancestors.

"Those spear points," I asked suddenly, "the ones they keep finding in the pipeline trench. Are they part of it?"

"Likely buried with him. I looked them up. They weren't all bronze; the newest is iron, maybe fifteen hundred years old. Just before the Christians came into Scotland."

"So the boat's not as old as we thought."

"Well, I think the body's *older* than anyone guessed. I dinnae think it's as old as two thousand years, but there's nae telling. The boat could be older—the folk who buried him could have kent it was there, like we did, and put him in."

"There's no way *ever* to tell," I said. "Because we dug it up and chopped it in pieces and tossed them about as if it didn't matter."

"*We* didnae do that," Ellen pointed out.

"No one can ever prove any of what you just said."

"Yon mystified doctor will help. If Strathfearn asks him to consider whether the body's ancient—well, then, it's a matter for the Society of Antiquaries instead of the High Court."

"It is," I breathed in agreement.

“So you dinnae think it’s mad? You think I should tell Strathfearn?”

“It’ll be the most wonderful, astonishing discovery of his entire *life*,” I said. “Even if he lives to be a hundred! Of course you should tell Sandy. But all that digging about for a murderer, all for nothing!”

“Best that way, though, aye, Julie?” she teased. “Look, I’ve made you a birthday present.”

She drew it from her pocket in a fold of black velvet. “Of course you must gie it back after, but you can wear it to your ceilidh dance wi’ your new gown. You’ll be the first one to wear it since Mary Queen o’ Scots.”

She’d strung together Mary Stuart’s matched Tay pearls to make a necklace. It was like a little strand of moonlight.

“*Crikey!*” I laughed hilariously, and for so long that Ellen started giggling, too. “I can’t wear these. Do you know what a necklace like this would cost? Even if it weren’t...*what it is?*”

“I ken better than you!”

“Everyone will *notice*.”

“But no one will recognize them. Jamie didn’t. Tell a story! You’re good at that. Say they’re on loan from the Murray Estate. That’s *true*. Hold still—turn around—”

With cool, smooth-tipped fingers she tied the pearls around my neck.

“I told you my folk don’t care much about keeping things. But it’s pleasure to give.”

She rested her hands on my shoulders for a moment.

“Let me see.”

I turned to face her, feeling radiant. She laughed.

“Och, they suit you, Queenie! Promise me you’ll wear them.”

“I absolutely will.”

I thought then that I’d give her my own pearl, the one I found in the envelope, the only one that didn’t get stolen. I’d give it to her whether she kept it or not. Because she’s right—it’s pleasure to give. I wanted to give her something that *mattered*. And I didn’t think she’d take anything else.

With tragic dark rings around her beautiful dark eyes, holding her proud head high, Solange was released into our flood of embraces and floral offerings, which she accepted with grace and tears.

She did not put fresh roses in Dr. Housman’s bedroom, nor greet him with forgiveness.

Housman himself seemed none the worse for his misadventures. He slept them off upstairs in the room he’d been given when he first arrived here, avoiding Solange. We did not treat the prodigal scholar kindly. Jamie, at Solange’s bidding, took the pearl earrings Housman had given her and used the box to wedge open the door to Housman’s room (I liberated the pearls first; we considered they were probably part of the

Murray Hoard, but Solange didn't need to know they were stolen). I delivered Housman a copy of the *Mercury* each evening, carefully folded open to choice stories: the most recent update on the log boat, or on the ancient body discovered on the Murray Estate, or even just an occasional gossipy tale of domestic bliss gone sour. Housman was too much of a coward ever to complain about us to Mother.

He'd been immediately sacked by the Murray Estate, but as he hadn't done any work for them since June anyway, it hardly mattered. His sister was supposed to fetch him back to England sometime soon. Frank Dunbar would not speak to him—they met once on the staircase while I was coming in the house, and Frank actually turned his back on Housman halfway down the stairs to avoid an encounter with him. Jamie and I took it in turns to be constantly in Housman's way when he tried to get out of the house, thwarting his pathetic attempts to go after his stolen treasure, which he presumably thought was still hidden in the river at the foot of the Drookit Stane.

It wasn't, of course. We'd got Ellen to plant the pearls in their jar quietly back in the Murray Collection, where Sandy would discover them eventually and report them to the National Museum of Antiquities or the Murray Estate. He hadn't noticed them yet, and I couldn't help thinking of them as our secret wedding present to him. I knew that just the discovering of them would make him joyful, even if he had to give them away in the end. It was *true*, what Ellen had said about giving; and nothing of Strathfearn's was ours anymore except in spirit.

Because now the Glenfearn School was ready to finish and furnish the Big House, and the other dormitories and the new classrooms, before the school term began. The grounds were not complete, but the house was nearly done—as was the catalog—and the plan was for the Murray/Beaufort-Stuart party to clear out north to Craig Castle in the week following the Laird of Moredun's Opening Day shoot. I had only a fortnight of my holiday left anyway. The day before the shooting party (and my birthday), Father arrived in the landaulet from Craig Castle, so as to be able to transport those of us who didn't fit in the Magnette. Sandy would stay on to finish the log boat excavation, but for the rest of us it was going to be good-bye to Strathfearn House for good.

The day of the shoot was warm and bright.

That was a blessing and a curse. I started out feeling brisk and happy, but by midmorning my blouse was sticking to my back, and when I took off my tweed jacket Jamie grumbled at me, even if he was my favorite brother, because the white stood out against the heather; notwithstanding I was well hidden in the butt and the birds couldn't *possibly* care what I was wearing. And I couldn't get my hair out of my eyes because of that vindictive nurse chopping it all different lengths so

that it wouldn't stay pinned. And I hadn't held a gun since December, so I had to be womanly and be satisfied picking up other people's dead birds with the dogs and beaters after each drive. And it was my birthday, but *even Euan and Jamie* were too focused on loading guns and killing birds to remember to say anything about it. And when they were kind and offered me a gun during one of the drives, I couldn't hit a single bird.

I would have started to feel sorry for myself had not Mummy and Mrs. Menzies arrived with the lunch at midday. They were accompanied by Jean McEwen leading ponies loaded with baskets stuffed to bursting. A couple of housemaids from the castle ran back and forth spreading white tablecloths over picnic rugs and laying out cold meats and Dundee cake, and, oh, lord, *one of the maids was Florrie*.

My legs were decently clad in stockings and Wellington boots this time, and I was in a proper tweed skirt of my own and not Sandy's hitched-up kilt, but in a sweaty blouse with shirtsleeves rolled up and hair standing in spikes in the Pitbroomie wind, the only things keeping Florrie from recognizing me were my collection of useless hairpins and the fact that this time I was supposed to be a girl.

I didn't think I could count on the hairpins to disguise me, so I threw all my soul into Being a Girl.

I snatched up a couple of cold beef sandwiches and two bottles of ginger beer and made a beeline for Francis Dunbar, standing awkwardly a little apart from everybody else, looking a little lost, with one hand deep in his pocket and a cigarette in the other. Father and Jamie were chatting to Moredun about moorland maintenance, Euan had vanished discreetly into the gorse with the rest of the beaters, Sandy was being solicitous of Mary, Jean McEwen was organizing the emptying of the ponies' baskets, and Mother was helping Mrs. Menzies be hostess to a party of about twenty-five local people who all knew each other. Frank was a clear outsider.

"Here you are, Mr. Dunbar," I said, holding up a sandwich and a bottle. He came out of his dream, smiled with pleasure, and crushed his cigarette underfoot.

"Thank you, Miss Beaufort-Stuart," he said. "Have you had a good morning? Oh—and many happy returns!"

I looked up at him archly (*so stupid*—perfectly embarrassing behavior on my part, but of course I was trying to avoid being recognized by Florrie). He took the bottle and sandwich and watched me wrestle ineffectively—on purpose—to get my own bottle open.

"Let me," he said, predictably.

This allowed our hands to brush against each other, and me to laugh as the fizzy drink popped and bubbled over the neck of the bottle, and when he gave it back to me we had to wipe our hands on the edge of a tablecloth. And we ended up sitting together.

"I've missed everything I've shot at," I admitted. "How about you?"

"Not too bad. I'm out of practice, but I've been satisfied this morning. I was a soldier for ten years; I did a lot of game hunting in India."

"That's right, you're a veteran of the Black Watch, like Sergeant Henderson and Alan McEwen! You'll wear your kilt tonight?"

"Of course!"

Embarrassing.

But I was enjoying it, too; and when he noticed my birthday present from Mummy, it was an excuse to give him my hand and let him hold it and admire it—my hand, I mean, though the ring was the excuse.

It is a square-cut ruby in rose gold, set between wee triangles of tiny pearls. I told him, "It was my great-grandmother's. My grandmother gave it to Mother for *her* eighteenth birthday." (See how I slipped that in? Quite true, but perpetuating the illusion that today was *my* eighteenth.)

"Are they Fearn river pearls?"

"All but one of them is. There's a story about it. The setting is French, and my grandmother lost one of the pearls right after she was married, and the jeweler in Perth couldn't match it. So my grandfather replaced them all with Fearn pearls that he'd found himself. After *my* mother was married, she lost another! So my father replaced it with a Dee pearl *he'd* found in the river on our estate at Craig Castle in Aberdeenshire. They don't quite match now—if you look closely."

"Would you believe that after all the time I've been at Strathfearn, I still can't tell a Fearn river pearl when I see one?" Frank said.

He raised my fingers and bent his head to look at the ring, then prudently let go, flushing a little.

"Can't you see the difference?" I asked.

"One's almost gold-hued!"

"That's the one from the Dee. The pinker ones are from the Fearn."

"Pearls from two of your rivers. I like that."

I said honestly, "I do, too. I love it fiercely for just that. Because it is a little bit of Strathfearn and a little bit of Craigie and a little bit of France, and of my mother and father and grandmother and grandfather, and I will have it with me always. It is all of ours and they are part of me."

We caught each other's eyes. I turned away demurely.

"Have you met my father?" I asked, recognizing the moment when our tête-à-tête was beginning to look too intimate. "Come be introduced." And that gave me the excuse to be tucked into Father's side with his arm around my waist, receiving a kiss on the head instead of the dreadful birthday bumps we used to get as small children. By this time I was fairly sure my diversion was successful and Florrie wasn't gasping for me today.

When the afternoon was over, one of the big guest bedrooms at Glenmoredun Castle was relegated to the girls to change in; and we got to use the bathrooms, which was delightful (if rushed). The castle is as

old as the one at Aberfearn, bits of it fourteenth century, but in good nick. Their hot-water boiler was installed five years ago, modern and efficient, unlike ours, which is Victorian. By the time the ceilidh was to start I'd been fully transformed, not just by the green-gold dancing frock and long white gloves and priceless necklace that wasn't mine, but also by my fairy godmother Solange's incredible magic wrought with hot curling tongs and sugar-water. I swear it took a full hour for her to wave my hair, and if it was not as swift a transformation as Cinderella's, it was certainly as complete. Not a single hairpin was used, and I ended up looking like I was ready to be photographed for *Vogue*.

Solange indeed looked beautiful, too, in a dress of asymmetric black and white panels that she bought the last time we were all in France. The other girls were rather in awe of her recent brush with injustice; I found myself feeling protective and proud.

The party was bittersweet, knowing we'd probably not be here next year. Also, as I found myself whirling and stamping to the same tunes that Euan had piped us three weeks ago, I grew melancholy about the McEwens. I had a moment of glory during one of the breaks as everyone sang "For She's a Jolly Good Fellow" and Father teased me about my aim but praised my fortitude, in light of my not-so-recent accident. I did not sit out one single dance. This, of course, is because I was being cunning about whom I danced with. And Francis Dunbar looked splendid, in his Black Watch kilt and black Prince Charlie jacket twinkling with silver. It took careful planning to end up across from him.

Ellen's necklace was a source of much probing curiosity.

The other ladies, to Mother: "My dear Esmé, *where* do Julia's pearls come from? That's surely not a birthday gift?"

"They're part of the Murray Estate. She says Sandy found them among the objects he's cataloging for the Murray Collection."

"Really, they ought to be locked up."

"She's to return them the second she takes her clothes off, I can assure you. And they *will* be locked up, or more likely put on display in a museum, but don't you think it's lovely that they're being *worn*?"

And the Menzies girls, my own age, to me: "Are those *your* pearls, Julie?"

"They're on loan from the Murray Estate."

"I'd be terrified to touch them, let alone dance in them!"

"Go on, touch. They don't bite!"

And Francis Dunbar, mid-waltz: "Are those Fearn pearls, too?"

"No, they're Tay pearls. They're not mine. They're part of the Murray Estate."

"Part of the Murray Estate," he echoed, staring down at me with that air of perpetual bafflement that makes him seem faintly vulnerable and which I find so appealing. "I thought those pearls were sold."

"Sandy found 'em in the Hoard," I said. "They have to go back

tonight.”

“How disappointing for you!”

“No, I’m happy I get to wear them for my birthday party. They make me sensational.”

He laughed. “You’d still be sensational without them.”

And because Mary had given me the key to her kitchen door to allow me to return the pearls to the Murray Collection straightaway, Mummy let me have the Magnette so I could stop at the Inverfearnie Library on my way back to Strathfearn House. And because Frank was going back to Strathfearn House too and there was an extra seat in the car, I asked him to come along with me.

Oh, that was probably an error. My own error. I should have at least *told* someone he was coming with me. But I was no longer being watched over like a Russian princess and it was late, and I was feeling adult and elegant and sure of myself—dressed for *Vogue*, old enough to be married—and I thought I was being responsible.

18. *As fair art thou, my bonnie lass*

The moon was one single night past full, the light flooding and shadowing the birchwood and the River Fearn. It was stunningly, ethereally beautiful. The little library on Inverfearnie Island had two yellow lights left welcomingly glowing, one in the kitchen and one upstairs.

“Mary said she’d go to bed about nine,” I said, as I drew the car up on the gravel in the circular drive in front of the old building and shut off the motor. The undying night voice of the Fearn was suddenly interrupted by a sharp, warning bark. Frank started.

“Is that the Travellers’ dog?”

“It’s the heron. They sometimes hunt at night. Listen—”

The heron cried again, wild and strange in the dark.

“I’m glad you know what it is!” Frank told me.

“Me too.” I laughed. “I don’t like ghosts!”

I got out. Frank had a harder time extracting his long body from the confines of the little Magnette. I laughed again, and went round the front of the car to hold the door for him.

“I’m supposed to do that for you!” he objected.

“Never mind, I know you can be chivalrous when you try.”

The night air was still warm; even in the evening wind of the open motorcar I hadn’t wanted a wrap. I got out Mary’s key. Frank offered me his arm to lean on as we made our way around the back. He held the door open for me, and followed me inside.

“Have you been here before?” I asked softly. Silly, I know, to keep our voices low, as Mary couldn’t possibly have heard us. But knowing she might be sleeping made me want to be quiet.

“I’ve not been inside.”

“How ridiculous! It’s a national treasure. It’s one of the oldest public lending libraries in Scotland, opened in the seventeenth century. Mostly just useful stuff for farmers and landowners, but there’s a rather wonderful display of first editions of Robert Burns and—”

It was too dark to see the display cases downstairs. I didn’t want to switch on lights.

“I can’t show you in the dark, but there’s a pearl bracelet that belonged to Mary Queen of Scots as a child. She gave it to the Murrays, and they gave it to the library.”

He drew in a breath, then exclaimed: “How wonderful!”

I led the way upstairs.

“This is the Upper Reading Room. This is where they’ve been

cataloging the Murray Collection.”

The casement window was propped open to the silver night. The Keiller jar of stolen pearls (minus the ones I was wearing) was *still* sitting on the big table in the middle, unopened, undiscovered. There was one electric standing lamp which Mary had left alight by the stairs. I glanced over my shoulder at Dunbar, a pace or two behind me; his face was shadowed, but the light behind him caught on his silver cuff buttons.

“Can you help me with the necklace?” I asked. “It’s not got a proper clasp—the pearls are strung on a thread that ties at the back. I can’t see to untie it.”

I turned around and bent my head. His fingertips at the nape of my neck were hard and gentle. I turned again when he’d finished and held out my hand for the pearls; they slid like running water from his palm into mine.

Again I turned around, and dropped the pearls into the small round wooden cup, cracked and black with age, where I’d first seen them, and they piled up in its dark globe like a little celestial host of moons.

That’s where you belong, I told them silently, and spun on one heel back to Dunbar.

“Oh, Julie, stop there a moment,” he begged. “You never stop moving. Let me *look* at you. Just for a moment—”

I did stop. It was startlement—the longing in his voice was so genuine, and unexpected. I froze and I tried to imagine what he saw: Tinker Bell in a cloud of spring-green chiffon, my mouth and eyelids dark with grown-up paint, lamplight glinting on the glossy artificial waves of my hair.

“*Julie*,” he repeated hoarsely.

No, he didn’t see a dusted fairy. He saw clear hazel eyes like cairngorm amber in the lamplight, and defiant hair like ripe wheat, and smooth skin like new milk. He saw through the colored powder and the floating silk. He saw a woman.

I took a step backward and found myself trapped against the library table. I grabbed the edge for support—the polished chestnut was slippery beneath my gloves. Here it comes if you want it, I thought, that kiss.

And suddenly I wasn’t sure I did. I wasn’t—well—I didn’t know if I was ready.

But he was more beautiful than ever in the black coat and silver buttons and Black Watch tartan, and I thought, Shame on me if I don’t *try*.

So I stood still and let him look at me. I had to turn my face aside a little so that the lamp behind him didn’t blind me. After a long, hushed moment he stepped across the space between us. He leaned down toward my face and kissed me very chastely on the lips. Just briefly, but so intimate. “You are—”

“What am I?” It came out as a whisper, half-caught in my throat.

"I don't exactly know," he laughed. And then he took me by the shoulders and suddenly it wasn't chaste anymore, suddenly another kiss came slamming into me like a rolling wave and I was caught in it like an empty shell dashed against shingle.

And I realized I *wasn't* ready. It really is that simple.

It wasn't that I didn't enjoy it. It was that I knew I was about to lose control. Ellen had let me choose. Even the Water Bailiff had let me choose. Francis Dunbar wasn't going to.

Our mouths were glued together and I was gripping the edge of the table behind me with both hands. I let go with one hand and reached up to grab him by the back of his neck, trying to dig my nails in to get his attention, trying to hurt him enough that he let go for a moment. The gloves foiled me. My nails were blunted and he mistook my grip for returned passion. I changed my tactic and got my fingers hooked between his collar and his throat, and pulled until he had to come up for air.

"What—?" he gasped.

"I lied to you!" I babbled wildly. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have—it was so easy. I'm not eighteen."

"It's not your birthday?"

"I'm not eighteen!"

Oh, heaven help us, does passion make all men *so stupid*? He still didn't understand that I was trying to turn him away.

"It doesn't matter, Julie," he said. "You needn't lie to me. No matter when—you're unbelievably lovely—"

"I'm sixteen," I rasped at him. *"Sixteen today. It's my sixteenth birthday today."*

He looked baffled for a moment, then showered me with his slow and melting film-star smile. He shifted his grip on my shoulders and murmured enticingly, "Many happy returns of the day."

I heard myself make a sound that could have as easily been a gasp of laughter as a sob of frustration. O God, I was being terribly cack-handed. I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

He moved his hands across my shoulders. He'd been a soldier and a hunter in India; his touch was firm and experienced, and his fingers were large and strong and restless. They slipped lightly a little down my torso and hesitated, tautening, over my breasts. He explored the lines of my body through the silk. I could tell he was doing it on purpose, touching me. It made me feel entirely naked.

"Don't," I said sharply. "Stop."

He paused. He was so much taller than me.

"You vixen," he said quietly, moving his hands back up to grip my shoulders, and bent his mouth to mine for another plunging kiss.

I was wholly out of my depth.

I tore my face away from his—it hurt to do it. I screamed desperately:

“Mary—Mary!”

Of course she couldn’t hear me.

But Francis Dunbar could, and he took a baby step backward, though he was still holding tight to my shoulders.

“Why, Julie!”

He was shocked, amazed to discover I didn’t want this. No, not amazed—*disbelieving*. Because he wasn’t toying with me. He was serious. *This is how a lad gives a kiss when he means it.*

“I’m not—I’m not ready!”

“Let me show you.”

“I know how. I’m not ready for *you*. It’s not right.”

Oh, if it *had* been right, he’d have *listened to me*.

“Julie,” he said gently, relentless as a road roller, “it’s easy. Don’t be afraid. You are *so beautiful*. I won’t hurt you again.”

And it was true, he wasn’t hurting me now. He was—*worshipful*, almost. But fearfully intimate. Now he’d somehow got his thumbs worked into the low neckline of my frock, and beneath the fabric he rubbed them gently across the bare skin of the sides of my breasts—and—*God*. It made the fine down stand up on my spine, like a cat’s.

Mary wasn’t going to come. I was on my own. I had to do something to wake him up—something he’d notice, something he’d *mind*.

I was arched backward now, cringing away from him, but still trapped by the table’s edge. One of my gloved hands slipped again and I thought fleetingly of throwing myself across the table, except it would make chaos of the Murray Collection, just when Sandy had finished sorting most of it out, and worse than that I’d risk Francis Dunbar throwing his hot and heavy body over mine. He didn’t care about the blinking flint arrowheads and bronze blades.

My hand, sliding backward, stopped abruptly against the baize table cover and knocked over the wooden cup with the necklace in it. I heard the pearls’ watery cascade as they slid out onto the table.

And a jigsaw hole tore open.

“How do you know there are pearls in the Murray Collection?” I whispered.

He sucked in air. For a moment he wore his look of bewildered worry, then regained his composure with that foolish, winning smile.

“I didn’t, till I saw these.”

“When I told you they were part of the Murray Estate you said you thought they’d been sold. Even my mother didn’t remember those pearls. *How did you know about them?*”

He hesitated for half a second. “Dr. Housman told me, of course.”

“Why would he have told you *anything about them?*”

This time his hesitation was damnably long. At last Dunbar answered with even care, “He talked about the collection all the time. I’d helped him move it from the Big House to the library; he knew I was interested

—”
“Yes, but he wouldn’t have said *anything* to you about the pearls because *he was going to steal them.*”

Dunbar’s invading hands tightened suddenly, involuntarily gripping me in a new way.

He whispered, “*You know.*”

“Of course I know—I found them! We *all* know, me and Jamie and Ellen and Euan! We found the Murray pearls where Housman left them, all three hundred and twenty-seven of them—we counted them on the riverbank!”

“You don’t—you don’t remember?”

“Remember what?”

He shook his head just once, his face serious. “Julie, it doesn’t matter.” Just like it didn’t matter how old I was, except this time he was bluffing. His voice was hollow, his grip still tense and harsh. He wasn’t worshipping me anymore. He was still bent on seduction, but for a different reason now, and in a different way. I had woken him up.

“You knew! You were in on it!” I accused. “You were going to share those pearls with him! You found them when you were moving the things to the library, and you must have hidden them together—”

I’d overheard Dunbar talking to Housman on my first day in the house; I remembered how Dunbar’s voice had brightened. The words came tumbling out almost faster than I could throw them at him.

“That telephone call—Housman rang to call you out to help him! He’d found the perfect hiding place—he’d been talking to Alan McEwen, he knew the McEwens would never go near the foot of the Drookit Stane. You must have gone to the library just after I did—you knew the Water Bailiff would be busy with the McEwens, and Mary was away, and you thought no one would notice you hiding the pearls—and afterward *you knew Housman wasn’t dead—*”

The pieces were clicking into place in my head as if by clockwork.

“That ancient body was a godsend for you both! It made it look as if Hugh Housman really had drowned! And when he stole my kilt and left his trousers by the river to make people think it was him they’d found, you *knew*—you *knew* he’d done it! You were angry about it! You were *helping* him—”

“Julie, *don’t*. Please stop.”

“You helped him hide! I’ll bet you slipped that dreadful suicide note under our carpet for him! You let him creep into your study at night—you left food for him! I *saw* him trying to get in—what a *flipping bungler* he is—he *came to the wrong door!* And now you’ve let him hang about the house for the past week because you both think you’re going to go back there at the end of the summer, when the rest of us are gone, and get the pearls back—”

Francis Dunbar pulled me tight against his body, crushing our ribs

together, and I could do nothing to separate my mouth from his, and the suffocating kiss was meant to silence me.

But my arm was free and I could see the jar with the rest of the pearls in it out of the corner of my eye. I reached for it and grabbed.

And in a flashing instant I knew where I'd seen that jar in the first place. I'd seen it out of the corner of my eye on that first morning at Strathfearn. Sitting on the flat stone where I'd been guddling for trout, laughing at Hugh Housman splashing about in the river with no clothes on, I'd heard the bramble and elder rustling behind me; and I'd turned my head a fraction just in time to catch, in the corner of my eye, a glimpse of that stoneware Keiller jar descending at speed toward the back of my skull.

The blasted thing was too heavy and smooth to pick up with one hand gloved in slippery silk. I shoved the jar off the table and it landed on the floor with a clunk. Dunbar raised his head and glanced over his shoulder.

"My God—Is that—?"

"*You hit me!*" I gasped. "It wasn't the river watcher with his cromach—you hit me with that jar full of pearls!"

"They're here?" he gasped in return.

"You *snake!*" He was holding on to me so tightly it was making my ribs ache. "Yes, they're here—not just that necklace but all the rest of them, too, all three hundred and twenty-seven of them—so what? *What about my head?*"

He relaxed his grip on me a little, and I managed to wrench myself sideways and dive under the table. I bowled the jar across the floor like a football and emerged on the other side of the table. I picked up the jar in both hands and scrambled to my feet.

"You recognize it, *don't you?* This jar full of pearls. They're all still here in this jam pot, except the ones I was wearing—"

"Julie, I didn't mean to—I thought you were one of the tinkers, and you'd seen Housman—"

"You *ran away!* At least Housman stuck around for a minute wondering if I was dead or alive! Anyway, couldn't you just have gone off without hitting me and come back later to hide your stupid jar? I didn't know what was in it or what you were up to! You didn't need to smash my head in—even if I *had* been a tinker, you didn't need to smash my head in!"

"I *panicked.*"

"*So am I panicking!*"

I flung the jar at the window. The casement was propped halfway, and the jar went straight through the leaded panes with a satisfying crash.

Dunbar cried out, "You—you didn't!"
He came tearing around the table.

I bolted. I ducked under the table again, hurled myself across the room and vaulted pell-mell down the stairs, screeching Mary's name—but she'd heard the glass breaking right above her room, and the jar smashing on the gravel outside her window. She came running with her shotgun just the way she'd done when I first broke one of her library windows three years earlier. For a moment we were wedged breast to breast on the narrow spiral stairs, Mary on the way up in her nightgown and bare feet, I on the way down in an evening frock of Chartreuse-colored silk and long gloves, like Cinderella at midnight.

"Julia! What's happened?"

"Francis Dunbar. Still there," I gasped, pointing her upward.

She didn't hesitate. We squeezed past each other and I skidded and bumped the rest of the way down on my silk-clad bottom.

I picked myself up, gathered the stupid dress around my waist, and tore outside. The open-topped Magnette stood waiting for me. I vaulted in over the door the way my brothers do; the blessed motor, still warm, started right away. Over the engine I heard people yelling a selection of my names as Dunbar and Mary called out to me, side by side in the smashed window of the Upper Reading Room.

"You damned seductive Bluebeard," I gasped—to myself, he couldn't hear me. "You *rat*. You greedy *rat*. *Those. Aren't. Your. Pearls—*"

I threw the car into reverse and screeched backward across the drive, spraying gravel against the nearest library windows. If anyone was calling to me still, I couldn't hear. I tried to shift into low and ground the gears terribly, so that the poor car shrieked in protest. I tried again, jammed the stick into the right place, and roared forward ten feet across the gravel. My glove slipped on the stick and I stalled trying to get into reverse again.

I tried to pull off the damned gloves. It took ages. I got my left hand free. Clutch in—engine on—the Magnette roared backward. I drove it like a road roller, ten feet backward and forward, up and down and up and down across the drive. Beneath the motorcar's screeching wheels, pearls and broken shards of jam jar ground against gravel, ground into powder, into stony dust.

Suddenly Francis Dunbar was practically on top of me again—he'd run out after me and somehow leaped onto the car. He now had one leg over the door frame as he tried to climb into the passenger seat and grab at the hand brake.

"*Get out!*" I snarled.

I lashed at him blindly. To my horror and satisfaction my fingernails connected with skin. He howled. The Magnette stalled again.

I cowered with my face against the driving-wheel and my arms over my head as Mary, close behind him, fired rather a lot of birdshot into the

back of Francis Dunbar's Black Watch kilt.

Mary was merciless.

Together, one of us on each side of him, we helped the moaning Francis Dunbar into her bedroom where she made him stand upright, leaning against her chest of drawers, while she laid out a multitude of protective towels before allowing him to collapse on his stomach on the bed.

"Now, Julia, you're not needed here. Go telephone the police, and an ambulance, and I'll get him some brandy. You know where the 'phone is."

So I did, rather dreading that they'd send Angus Henderson. (They didn't.)

After I'd hung up the receiver I thought I'd better put a call through to Glenmoredun Castle and Strathfearn House.

At last Mary left her victim groaning in her bedroom, waiting for proper medical assistance. I heard her close the door and step out into the corridor. I was still sitting, like a stunned bird, in the telephone cupboard.

"Come along, Julia, come sit in my study. I'll get us both a cup of tea. Or—you'd like brandy, too, perhaps."

"Tea's fine."

She settled me in the red leather chair and bustled about in her dressing gown with her ear trumpet hanging triumphantly on its gold chain around her neck.

"You're my knight in shining armor, Mary," I said, when she was facing me.

"What did he *do* to you?"

"He's the one who gave me that dunt on the head."

"Then I'm *glad* I shot him," she said fiercely. The cup and saucer she'd been holding clattered as she set it back on her desk. She came and sat on the footstool by my side and suddenly buried her face against my knee, weeping into the leaf-green chiffon.

I had to fiddle with the chain around her neck to free the trumpet. I held it to her ear and bent over her, with one hand resting gently on her shoulder. I said, "Great Scott, Mary, don't cry!"

"It's a crime to shoot a man," she sobbed. "Your grandfather had to appear in Perth Sheriff Court that time he shot the poacher. They put Mademoiselle Lavergne in prison just because they *thought* she'd killed Dr. Housman, even though she hadn't. What will happen to me? I'll lose my position—what in the world will I do?"

I was pretty sure what I'd just done to the Murray Estate pearls wasn't legal either. I wasn't in the least afraid of what would happen to *me*, and it seemed unbearably unjust that Mary should fear for her life's work

because she'd defended me when I was being attacked.

"Sandy will make sure you're all right," I assured her, certain of this. "And I will, too. I'll defend you in court if I have to! So will my mother!"

"I never do the right thing," she wept.

"What *tosh!* You do better than that. You are able to *see* when you've done wrong. Most people just try to make excuses."

She scrubbed at her eyes, still weeping.

"I want to *be* like you, Mary—"

"Oh, Julia, how *could* you!"

"I do! Oh, I—You are so—so clever and independent and brave—so brave! I feel I could never be as brave as you—to have so much of the world pitched against you all the time, and face it and face it and face it."

I leaned down to kiss her smooth, tearstained cheek. "I have always wanted to be like you."

She didn't show any signs of stopping, and for a while I just let her cry, leaning over her with my arms around her shoulders. Probably, if I'd just spent an evening at home in a lonely old house by myself, too self-conscious to go dancing with my intended at his little sister's birthday party, and then had to shoot a man in said little sister's defense, I'd have collapsed in tears at the end of it, too.

When her sobs began to subside a little I squeezed her in my arms again.

"Do buck up, Mary, I want my tea."

She gave a choking little laugh.

"I'd better find a handkerchief first," she said.

She extricated herself from my clinging arms. I realized I'd been holding on to her rather desperately.

She looked up at me with fond, red-rimmed eyes.

"You are quite like me in some ways," she said, and stood up with determination, and went to get the kettle.

The Murray Estate initiated charges of theft against both Housman and Dunbar—of the necklace Ellen made me! Which was all that was left of the Murray pearls after that night at the library. MacGregor's hadn't valued it by the time we were ready to depart Strathfearn, but the whispers I heard *began* at the staggeringly preposterous sum of *seventy thousand pounds*. Father said it would likely raise more than that at auction; the British Museum and the Ashmolean had already both expressed interest, not to mention the National Museum in Edinburgh. Father thought it was even possible some of the amount would come back to Sandy if it completely cleared Granddad's debt.

Housman and Dunbar were expected to plead guilty to try to mitigate the sentence; and Housman was also going to act as a witness to Angus

Henderson trying to get the McEwens in trouble by dumping my senseless body on the path near Inchfort Field. A prank against Travellers wouldn't be considered much of a crime, but accessory to an assault against the Earl of Strathfearn's granddaughter was a serious accusation against the Water Bailiff. I liked the idea that *even unconscious* I might have helped to put a stop to Angus Henderson ever again battering Euan McEwen.

In the meantime Francis Dunbar was still in hospital on his stomach, and there was a new project manager taking over for the final phase of the Glenfearn School renovation. This young man delivered a letter without an envelope to Mother as she passed him in the corridor on her way into the morning room.

"For the Earl of Strathfearn, I believe," the man told her briefly. "I'm still sorting through Mr. Dunbar's desk drawers next door." He disappeared back into his own office.

Mother found herself looking down at yet another sheet of Housman's engraved writing paper, frowning. I jumped up to read over her shoulder.

My dear Sandy—As you requested, I'm returning the samples you supplied...

Mother lowered her hand with the letter in it.

"This isn't for Sandy," she said. "It's two years old. It's from Dr. Housman to my father. But why would it be among Francis Dunbar's correspondence—"

"*It's the letter that went in the empty envelope!*" I cried. "Dunbar must have got it out of Housman's bedroom—he was up there right after Housman disappeared, before the police got to it. He said he was looking for Housman's address! Don't you see? Housman took it when he took the pearls. Maybe he even told Dunbar where to find it after he went into hiding! Oh, Mummy, it will explain why Granddad didn't sell the pearls—*let me see—*"

I couldn't be good. I snatched it from her.

"Julia!"

"*Let me read it!*"

She let me.

My dear Sandy—As you requested, I'm returning the samples you supplied and am writing to confirm the values I suggested in our earlier discussion by telephone. As I said then, I do not feel you would benefit by selling these at this time....

I looked up. Suddenly my heart was breaking.

Mummy could see that in my face.

"What's wrong, darling?"

"I don't know why those snakes didn't burn this piece of paper," I said furiously. "Or—I do, they kept it because there's a little inventory list of pearls at the end of the letter. But—"

"Julia, I will expire right on this spot if you don't tell me what's in it,"

Mother scolded. She sounded very much like me all of a sudden.

I wanted to cry.

“Granddad tried to sell the pearls to save the Reliquary,” I told her. “And Housman lied to him and said his museum didn’t want them.”

The pearls may be of historical significance, but without proof the Ashmolean is not willing to make a financial offer—

Now I was crying. Tears dropped onto the page, smearing the treacherous ink.

“I bet Housman never even *showed* them those pearls! They’re jolly well interested *now*, aren’t they? He was already scheming about getting hold of them, even while Granddad was alive! And you know what else —”

Mother prized the damp letter from my hand so she could read it herself.

“You know what else, I’ll bet Granddad never opened this. Ellen said he never opened post after he’d asked someone to confirm a telephone call in writing.” I had to stop and take a breath, choking on little sobs. “Except that this envelope had a few pearls in it that Housman was returning to him. I’ll bet Granddad just put the whole packet back with the rest of the Murray Collection pearls when it arrived. Housman probably opened it himself when he found it.”

Mother looked up at me, and now her face was tearstained too.

“I’m not crying over the *pearls*,” I wept. “I’m not even *sorry* about them. Just—*Granddad*.”

I took another gasping breath.

“Oh, Granddad.”

“My dad,” Mummy breathed. “Yes.”

She took me in her arms and we sobbed together.

The pearls *would* save the Reliquary. The necklace was so valuable that it would pay for the Reliquary to stay in the Inverfearnie Library, alongside Mary Stuart’s bracelet.

Feeling triumphant and proprietorial, Jamie and I managed to dig up a couple of the rosebushes to take with us, though most of them were too old to move.

Mémère was scornful of our efforts. “The same ones are already growing at Craig Castle. They all come from my sister’s garden in France.”

I wished I could be like that; and like the McEwens; able to let things go without looking back.

But I was determined to look forward, too.

Jamie and I went to Inchfort Field for the last time early in the morning before we left Strathfearn.

“It’s been almost like a Shakespearean comedy, hasn’t it?” Jamie said

as we crossed the iron footbridge. “One of the darker ones, where someone has to be saved from execution or from being eaten by a bear. Everyone romping in the wood and bumping into the wrong people. You, for example, should have been wandering the bonny banks of the Fearn kissing Euan McEwen all summer, not throwing yourself at Francis Dunbar.”

“Kissing Euan McEwen, gracious!” I exclaimed. “I never even *thought* about kissing Euan.”

“He thinks of you,” Jamie said.

I caught Euan on the path from the field to the river, almost exactly where we’d met two months ago, though I do not remember that meeting. He was carrying a milk can down to the burn to fill with water for washing. Jamie gave me a quiet wink as he went on past us up to Inchfort.

I took Euan by the arm and made him put down the can.

“You’re up early, Davie Balfour,” he said.

“We’re away now,” I answered. “I came to say good-bye.”

The melancholy of the end of the summer holidays, which I expect *never* goes away no matter how old you are, hit me suddenly in the chest.

“I have to go back to school,” I explained mournfully.

He laughed.

“Also,” I said, “I have never properly thanked *you* for picking me up off the path and taking me to the hospital, so—”

So I kissed him, in the dappled light of the birches by the running sunny waters of the River Fearn, full of peat and secrets, and he kissed me back very gently and easily, and we both meant it.

But—

But I thought of Ellen while I was doing it.

Was it better kissing Euan or Ellen? Euan’s kiss was honest, the only honest kiss I’ve helped myself to all summer. But Ellen—goodness—I can’t decide.

I don’t understand the difference between my passion for Francis Dunbar and my passion for Ellen McEwen. They were both, in their way, impossible to act on, impossible for either one to end well. And that means I just have to live forever a little aching and incomplete. But—There’s something else.

It’s nothing to do with the kissing. Or—not *just* to do with the kissing. I could stay with Ellen for the rest of my life, kisses or no kisses. I could never put up with Francis Dunbar indefinitely. Even if he hadn’t nearly killed me, I’d have wanted to throttle him for being so wet eventually.

But Ellen McEwen, seeing through me and accepting what she finds—*showing me myself*...

When I found her at Inchfort that morning, I gave her my pearl. I

didn't need to tell her where it came from, and she didn't have to ask. She closed her fingers around it and smiled.

"Pinkie will miss you," she said.

"Oh, *Nell*." I wanted to cry.

"I suppose I might miss you, too," she admitted softly.

I was damned if I'd cry.

"There're pearls in the Dee up at Craig Castle," I said, rather desperately. "And the oats and tattie harvest when the summer's done. You'd be welcome."

"Your dad invited mine already."

"But I'll be in school," I mourned.

"Not *always*," she pointed out. "And I might find another lad like your brother and forget about you."

She said that. As if I might, in her imagination, be an alternative to finding a lad.

"You think so?" I challenged.

"Would you mind?"

"I want you to be happy."

"Och, away wi' you, Queenie."

"I *do*," I said stubbornly.

She cocked her head, and gave that little appraising *hnnph*.

"Well," she said at last. "You're better at giving than you were."

Then softly she sang a part of the song she'd sung to me at the ceilidh at Inchfort, Burns's "Red, Red Rose":

*"Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun:
I will love thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run."*

She stopped. She was waiting for an answer.

I started to sing the rest, and she joined in. I *so loved* singing with her.

*"And fare thee well, my only love!
And fare thee well awhile!
And I will come again, my love,
tho' it were ten thousand mile."*

She opened her hand. The pearl gleamed for a moment on her open palm. And then she put it in her mouth and swallowed it.

She met my eyes, waiting for my reaction. For a moment I was stung and blinded by tears.

Then we both burst out laughing.

The kisses don't matter.

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Author's Note

Living with Uncertainty: Travellers and Pearls

The 2011 census records about 4,200 people living in Scotland today who identify themselves as Travellers. That's probably a low estimate; there may be four times that many. The Scottish Government recognizes "Gypsies/Travellers" as an ethnic group, and is taking a stance against the ingrained prejudices and active discrimination that is launched against them to this day. Scottish Travellers include several distinct nomadic identities, some with Romany (Gypsy) connections; the cultural groups loosely termed Highland Travellers are native to Scotland, sometimes tracing their heritage as far back as the twelfth century. Like the McEwen family, many take their names from Scottish clans. For generations, folk outside their way of life have disparagingly referred to them as "tinkers" because of their trade in tin and metal.

I am an outsider to the Traveller way of life, which is partly why I chose to tell this story from Julie's outsider's point of view. The small portrait of the Highland Travellers represented by the McEwen family in these pages does not reflect the full spectrum of local names, folkways, beliefs, bloodlines, and customs associated with Travellers from different parts of Scotland, nor does it deal with the complexities of their relationship with authority and the law, nor does it actually show them *on the move*. It's a glimpse into their lifestyle *during one summer* in the 1930s, but tells you little about their long history or how their communities have been scattered and disrupted in the past hundred years.

Scottish Travellers, like other nomadic ethnic groups throughout Europe, have long been treated as pariahs. But for hundreds of years Travellers made an intricate and intrinsic contribution to agricultural and village life throughout Scotland, as they assisted with seasonal work and provided an assortment of essential goods and services to Scots living in fixed dwellings. The sweeping changes of the twentieth century have caused cataclysmic upsets to their lifestyle, and indeed, to their cultural heritage.

Ironically, the automobile, that revolutionary mode of individual transport, appears to be responsible for some of the most negative recent impacts on Scottish Travellers. With cars came road improvements and laws that shut down ancient camping greens, closed well-worn paths and byways, and enabled remote settled communities independent access to the myriad goods and services that Travellers had once provided for

them. Many Travellers were respected horse dealers, and the gasoline engine put an end to the horse trade. Scottish river pearls, found in freshwater pearl mussels, were another traditional source of Traveller income; the pearl mussel's decline in Scotland is probably also due in no small part to the automobile.

The freshwater pearl mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*) is now considered by some to be the *most endangered species in the world*. Though pollution and destruction of habitat also played their part in the decline of the pearl mussel, the discovery of the enormous Abernethy pearl in the River Tay in 1967 created a media sensation and started a sort of Scottish "pearl rush." There was then no law against taking pearls; cars made it easy for day-trippers who knew nothing about pearl fishing, except that they were eager to get rich quick, to access remote stretches of riverbank and leave them stripped.

Within thirty years the pearl mussel population in Scotland had been utterly decimated. In 1998 the freshwater pearl mussel officially became a fully protected species and it is now a criminal offense to disturb them. The pearl mussel is so close to extinction that there is no retail trade in new Scottish river pearls *at all*. If you sell Scottish river pearls, you must have a license from the Scottish Government to do so, even if the pearls you are selling belonged to your grandmother and you want to sell them privately. They must be known to have been taken before 1998 to be legal. On its web page dedicated to the freshwater pearl mussel, Scottish Natural Heritage urges people to report to the police any suspicious activity seen in or around rivers that may contain mussels. Scotland's protected rivers are now the last fragile breeding ground for a species that was once widespread throughout Europe.

Until about thirty years ago, there was an intrinsic connection between Scottish Travellers and freshwater pearl mussels. Now, with the Traveller lifestyle and the pearl mussel's habitat both under threat, their futures will take distinctly separate courses. I am cautiously hopeful for both.

We don't ken half what's buried in the peat.

Part of the joy of writing this book was that it is set *where I live*. I've never done that before. Everything I wanted to look at was right at my fingertips. Cairncross of Perth, one of two retailers in Scotland who are licensed to sell Scottish river pearls, is within walking distance of my house. Cairncross were very generous and enthusiastic about showing me their stock, even though they knew perfectly well I wasn't going to buy anything; without getting up close and personal with Scottish river pearls, I'd never have become aware of the subtleties of color and luster that make these jewels so exquisite. The Scottish Crown Jewels on

display in Edinburgh Castle are set with Scottish river pearls, too, but those are locked behind glass.

Cairncross is not the only local organization who let me get close to my subject matter. I experienced a wonderful insider's view into Iron Age Perthshire by volunteering on the Moredun Top hill-fort excavations in 2015 and 2016, sponsored by the Tay Landscape Partnership and led by David Strachan. Strachan also led the Carpow Log Boat excavation in 2006. The Carpow Log Boat dates to 1130–970 BC and was discovered in Carpow Bank at the confluence of the River Earn and the River Tay, the setting for my imaginary Strathfearn. I saw the log boat on display in the Perth Museum in 2012; needless to say, it provided the initial inspiration for this book. While *The Pearl Thief* was in progress, the Carpow Log Boat was being scrutinized at the Glasgow Museums Resource Centre and wasn't on public view, but David Strachan kindly pointed me to a newer Tay log boat (485 AD) in the MacManus Gallery in Dundee.

Look away now if you're reading this before you've finished reading the novel, because there are spoilers ahead.

There is no evidence that the Carpow Log Boat had any ritual use, but nor has such a use been discounted, for the exact reason Ellen McEwen cites in the novel: river crossings are strange and sacred places. However, no bog bodies have ever been discovered in mainland Scotland. This thread of the story comes from Wilmslow in Cheshire, England, where I lived when I was just starting school, and from the discovery there of a two-thousand-year-old body in Lindow Common in 1984. This murdered man, now on display in the British Museum, may well have been the victim of ritual sacrifice. As a four-year-old living not far from Lindow Common I was *terrified* of the place because of the eerie role it played in Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*. The discovery of the ancient body there in my twentieth year seemed like a complete vindication of my earlier anxiety.

But this is what authors do: we make up stuff that might be true. We populate the concrete landscape of the real world with the spirits and atmosphere of the landscape of our imagination. Sometimes the difference is very nebulous. Strathfearn does not exist; but Perthshire does, and so does the River Tay, and the River Fearn is closely related to the River Earn. The geology and geography of the imaginary landscape where I have situated the Strathfearn estate is a sort of artist's impression of the Earn valley. Elcho Castle stands where Aberfearn Castle might have stood, the village of Bridge of Earn is more or less in the same place as Brig O'Fearn, and the concrete telephone box (one of two survivors of its 1929 design) is in Rhynd, near Perth. Strathfearn House, renovated to become the Glenfearn School, could quite easily be mistaken for Freeland House, now home to the Strathallan School. I imagine Glenmoredun Castle in the same place as Balvaird Castle, though in better condition; I've deforested Dunbarrow Hill to turn it into the Pitbroomie grouse

moor. And everything is a bit closer together in my fictional Perthshire landscape.

The Inverfearnie Library is the most uprooted location in the book. It's a tribute to the Innerpeffray Library on the River Earn near Crieff in Perthshire. The Innerpeffray Library was founded in 1680 by David Drummond, Third Lord Madertie; it was the first free public lending library in Scotland and is now the oldest. In 1680, making books available to the public for free was more or less unprecedented. Originally the library was housed in the Innerpeffray Chapel, which dates to 1507, with the current structure purpose-built for the collection in 1762. The library is funded to this day through a trust set up by its founder, alarmingly styled the "Innerpeffray Mortification." The Mortification is now a Scottish Charity (SC013847) and is supplemented with visitor donations. The current Library Manager and Keeper of Books is a young woman with a degree in English and theater.

And thank you.

I tend to be shy and sneaky about my research. I did tell Cairncross of Perth that I was working on a book when I visited them, but I didn't give them any details, and I didn't have the courage to tell the Keeper of Books at Innerpeffray what I was doing when I visited the library, either. There is, however, one person who was let in on the project in detail: Jess Smith, storyteller, author, and outstanding advocate for the Traveller community in Perthshire and beyond. She was my consultant in the art and culture of pearl fishing, advised me on the use of cant within the text of *The Pearl Thief*, and spent a painstaking amount of time annotating the original draft of my book. It was her suggestion that the Murray pearls be a gift from Mary Queen of Scots, which changed the course of the story. And her own writing provided me with a wealth of resources for the Traveller background for *The Pearl Thief*. I alone take full responsibility for any errors I've made in my portrayal of Scotland's Traveller community, but Jess Smith has been hugely supportive to me in this project and I hope that it helps to give her own life's work a wider voice. Her website is www.jesssmith.co.uk.

A novel is a much more collaborative project than readers may realize. This one had no less than five editors working on it: Amy Black, Kate Egan, Ellen Holgate, Emily Meehan, and Julie Rosenberg all helped to craft it into the thing of beauty that it has become. Amanda Banks, Miriam Roberts, and Tori Tyrrell were my usual trio of first readers, and I now don't know what I'd do without them, as they are always *so fast* with their feedback. Kathryn Davie, knowing nothing about the story except where it was supposed to take place, insisted I include Elcho Castle in it: so Aberfearn Castle was born. I am also grateful to Iona

O'Connor, my "Scotland" consultant (she also helped me with *Code Name Verity*), and to Sally Poynton and her father, who provided background information on early twentieth-century farm equipment. And of course I would never get anywhere without the staunch and steadfast support of my agent, Ginger Clark, who I happen to know wears Scottish river pearls from Cairncross in her ears.

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excavation: <http://www.pkht.org.uk/index.php/projects/carpow-logboat/>

Innerpeffray Library Website: <http://www.innerpeffraylibrary.co.uk/>

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Remembering and understanding history is at the heart of the novel. What has happened in the past that people seem to have forgotten? Why are these things important? How does knowing about the past—especially Julie’s family’s past—contribute to Julie’s identity? Is family history something that is a part of every person’s identity? How is or isn’t it part of your own?
2. What do you think motivates Julie’s flirtatious behavior? What reason—or reasons—does she have for kissing Frank Dunbar, Florrie, Le Sphinx, Angus Henderson, Ellen, and Euan?
3. How is *The Pearl Thief* a story of Julie’s coming-of-age?
4. What did you learn about the status of women during the time period of the book? What are some of the ways the female characters deal with societal restrictions and social pressures? Do any of the women in this novel embody feminist ideals? Discuss how opportunities for women have evolved since the 1930s and what prejudices and roadblocks remain. What advice would you give someone who is treated differently or unfairly because of gender or class?
5. Julie says to Ellen, “It’s *hard* to have your happiness tangled up in things you can’t keep.” How does Ellen feel about giving, receiving, and keeping things? How does Julie’s perspective change? Does Ellen’s change as well? How?
6. Though *The Pearl Thief* takes place in 1938, in what ways are its issues of prejudice and discrimination relevant to us today? How has this novel changed the way you think about privilege and persecution? What actions could you take to change the minds of others?
7. Consider the power of place in Julie’s life. How do places—and her experiences in those places—affect her life? Compare and contrast Julie’s relationship to Strathfearn with Ellen’s.
8. What views of gender roles and of “male” and “female” behavior does the novel offer? Where does Julie get her ideas of what “male” and “female” are, and where does she find models of how to behave? Why do you think she enjoys playing at both “being a girl” and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Kidnapped* character Davie Balfour?

9. How does Julie's memory of her grandfather and the capture of an incompetent pearl hunter set the tone for how she deals with other acts of violation and defilement against people, the river and landscape, and historic artifacts?
10. Julie saves Ellen from sexual assault at the hands of the abusive Sergeant Henderson. Why do you think Julie reacted in the manner that she did? What other options did she—and Ellen—have? How do you think you would have dealt with the situation?
11. What do you think about Julie's choice of what to do with the recovered pearls? If you had been in Julie's situation, what would you have done?
12. Is this a book that would have been written for young people in 1938, the time in which it is set? How might the characters have been different if it had been written then? Is there anything about the way the story is told that would make you think the novel was written in the twenty-first century? Explain.

Turn the page for a sneak preview of



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Flight Lieutenant James G. Beaufort-Stuart:

The night of 6–7 November 1940—how many of us dead in that raid?

I don't know.

I know nine men in 648 Squadron's A-Flight were killed that night just because of *weather*. Two planes collided in fog just before landing, and one came down heavy with ice. But I don't know how many in A-Flight fell to enemy fire.

How many in B-Flight, then? My own lads . . . I ought to know that, at least.

But I don't. Not offhand. I'd have to sit and count. I probably made a note in my logbook. That night wasn't the first time we took a heavy loss, and it wasn't the last time. *Buckets of blood*. It wasn't as many as last time. Anyway it's hard to remember all the losses, which for Bristol Blenheim bomber crews was just about every mission, and I get some of the dead men muddled when I try to count. The Royal Air Force isn't going to win the war flying Bristol Benheims.

I'd argued with Wing Commander Talbot Cromwell before we took off on that mission. That wasn't the first time, either. I knew he didn't like me, and I risked an official reprimand, or worse, a demotion, every time I challenged him. We didn't see eye to eye on *anything*.

"We'll never find German warships if we're flying at twenty thousand feet!" I told my commanding officer. I didn't even try to hide my anger. "There's no hope in hell of a Blenheim hitting anything from that height anyway. The bomb doors don't always open when you want them to, and up there you can't tell whether a speck out the window is an enemy destroyer or a bit of runway mud stuck on the Perspex!"

"Are you quite finished, Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart?" said Cromwell, lowering his eyebrows like barrier gates. "You'll fly at twenty thousand feet, and so will all your men. Orders are orders. That's where Coastal Command wants you to fly. I take my instructions from headquarters and you take yours from me."

Cromwell and I had been at each other since the day we first came together about two weeks earlier.

He got transferred to us in October when we moved to Shetland as the Battle of Britain came to an end. Our squadron patrolled the North Sea for the Royal Air Force, the RAF, just as we'd done at other bases all through the summer of 1940. But Cromwell's role with 648 Squadron was new. Before he got lumbered with us, he'd commanded a squadron of speedy new Spitfire fighters. In August and September, while we were flying Benheims under cover of cloud on low-level bombing raids targeting German ships, he'd been sending fighter pilots into soaring dogfights in the sun.

None of our experiences matched up. He couldn't manage twin engines and didn't join us when we flew. And he didn't like it that at nineteen years old I was

half his age, shorter and slighter than most of the other lads and barely needing a shave, yet I talked back. He didn't like that all of B-Flight were on my side because they were Blenheim airmen too; maybe I looked like a schoolboy, but they knew I wasn't. I'd been their flight leader since August.

And sending us on a bombing raid with only a half-moon to light us, above cloud at twenty thousand feet? I was reckless with frustration.

"It's stupid, *stupid*—everyone knows it. The men are complaining. *You* know it's stupid. *Above the cloud*? We won't be able to see the sea, let alone ships in the dark! And the air's too thin up there for a Blenheim to operate efficiently. It's not like flying a Spitfire! We cruise best at fifteen thousand feet, and when we're in combat we take it as low as we can, it helps camouflage us. And the Jerries—the German fighters all *know* they can go higher and faster, and they circle like vultures, *waiting*—"

"None of my Spitfire pilots complained about danger," Cromwell said coldly. "I expect more of a young man of your caliber, *Beaufort-Stuart*. This sounds like lack of moral fiber."

Lack of moral fiber—that wonderful euphemism for cowardice.

I couldn't let him accuse me, or worse, my 648 Squadron airmen, of being cowards.

I said stiffly, "Sir. I'm leading B-Flight on a mission tonight. I want the best for them."

"When you go in at low level, you get shot up by enemy antiaircraft guns," Cromwell told me, as if I didn't know. "We need to change our tactics."

It was true that most of our losses came from guns on the ground or at sea level. I couldn't argue with that. But I felt sure that a raid at twenty thousand feet would end in the same tears for different reasons, or at best, be completely pointless because we wouldn't hit anything. It wasn't the first time Coastal Command had tried it.

However, with no winning counterargument, off we went, hoping a few of us would make it back safely in five hours or so. Following orders.

The Blenheims were like a herd of shadowy brontosauri waiting on the airfield in the dark beneath the high cloud.

"Come on, Scotty, buck up," said David Silvermont, my navigator, as we lowered ourselves in our bulky flight suits through the forward hatch of that night's plane. Being the only Scot in the squadron meant that I mostly hadn't been called Jamie for the past year or so, except on leave. "We can't have you in a funk—it brings everybody down. The lads take your moods very seriously."

"Wing Commander Cromwell bloody well doesn't," I retorted. "I wish he'd have a go at you sometime instead of me."

"No chance, as you're the officer in charge. Anyway I am much bigger and older than you, and better looking too and probably smarter, so he doesn't dare."

"And you have a bigger head than me!" I laughed.

Most of those things were true, as David Silvermont was two years my senior and had been halfway through a medical degree when the war started. But he was also my best friend. He was easy to like and smooth with girls, with the

brooding dark looks of a film star, and was good at breaking up fights and at making me laugh. Silver read poetry before he went to bed; he played Mozart on the cracked fiddle he'd found in the officers' lounge when we were off duty; but those highbrow occupations didn't stop him plotting a course by dead reckoning, or spotting enemy convoys, or having a sense of humor.

He was a wizard navigator.

"What's up?" called our air gunner and wireless operator, Colin Oldham, from his place in the back of the Blenheim.

"Just the usual scrapping with Cromwell," I grumbled. "Accused me of 'lack of moral fiber.' "

"Rubbish! *He's* not flying tonight, is he!" Colin exclaimed.

"I expect he doesn't like your poncey double-barreled surname," Silver teased me. "It reminds the old Roundhead that your dad's the Earl of Craigie, and then he wants to start the Civil War over again. Can't have teenage toffs telling him what to do."

Colin howled. "The Old Roundhead! Suits him!"

"I don't tell him what to do," I protested, checking the instruments and controls while Silver and Colin belted their harnesses in place. "I make polite suggestions about what *not* to do. And being the youngest of five sons doesn't mean a thing. They ran out of titles before they got to me."

"It's your classical education he doesn't like," put in Colin.

"I'll make a list, shall I? Perhaps if I were taller or bigger or grew a mustache ____"

"He doesn't like me much, either," Silver said with sympathy.

"You both make him feel inferior," said Colin. "All that heady talk in the officers' lounge comparing hydraulics to blood pressure. He can't keep up."

"Hydraulics and blood pressure are endlessly fascinating," said Silver. He spread his chart on his knees, holding his electric torch ready in his gauntleted hand. He declared with satisfaction, "From tonight I shall always think of him as the Old Roundhead."

My B-Flight aircrews knew what we were doing that night—three planes in my own Pimms Section and three in Madeira Section, with three men in each plane. In a few minutes I'd be in the sky in the dark in charge of eighteen men, counting myself, and in a few hours half of them would be dead.

I didn't know then what the full toll of that night would be, and I tried to lighten the tone as we set out. I called over the radio to Pimms and Madeira as we took off. "Setting course for target and climbing to twenty thousand feet, as per orders from the Old Roundhead."

Over the intercom I heard Colin behind me laughing again.

"The Old Roundhead might be keeping a listening watch," Silver warned me.

"I don't mind. I'll get another damned reprimand. He already knows what I think of him."

We flew obediently high, heading for a flotilla of German warships that was supposed to be cruising fifty miles off the Norwegian coast. After about an hour and a half, maybe we were over the ships we were supposed to hit and maybe we

weren't. The sky was clear and blue-black, but the half-moon lit the thin cloud below us like a sheet of milky Chinese silk. I could see the other B-Flight planes standing out in black silhouette like decals against that cloud.

So, too, could the German Messerschmitt 110 night fighters on patrol.

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ELIZABETH WEIN was born in New York City, grew up abroad, and currently lives in Scotland with her husband and two children. She is an avid flyer of small planes and holds a PhD in folklore from the University of Pennsylvania. Elizabeth is the author of *Code Name Verity*, winner of the Edgar Award in the Best Young Adult category and a Printz Honor Book; *Rose Under Fire*, winner of the Schneider Family Book Award; and *Black Dove, White Raven*, winner of the Children's Africana Book Award. Visit her online at www.elizabethwein.com.

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